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# DETECTIVE

## MAGAZINE

COMBINED WITH FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION

**MR. MADDOX'  
HAUNTED  
HORSE**  
by T. T. FLYNN

**A  
CORPSE  
ON ME!**

by JOHN D.  
MacDONALD



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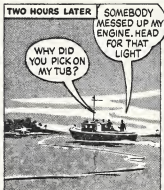
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# AND THEN JEFF SPRUNG THE TRAP...



WHAT GOES?  
NEVER MIND THE QUESTIONS. CAST OFF AND LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

TIED UP TO A LONELY DOCK IN A SMALL SOUTHERN BAY, JEFF BELL, "TROPICAL TRAMP" IS SPENDING A QUIET EVENING ABOARD HIS BATTERED LAUNCH, WHEN...



TWO HOURS LATER

SOMEBODY MESSED UP MY ENGINE. HEAD FOR THAT LIGHT

WHY DID YOU PICK ON MY TUB?



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ONE MORE BOX, PETE



HEAVE TO!

SO! IT WAS A PLANT! DUMP THOSE PLATES!

HOLD IT! I'M TAKING OVER NOW!



LATER

TRAP WORKED. COUNTERFEITERS LED ME TO CACHE. BOTH CAPTURED, ALONG WITH PLATES. BELL

I'LL BE GLAD TO SHED THIS BEACHCOMBER RIG. CAN I CLEAN UP HERE?

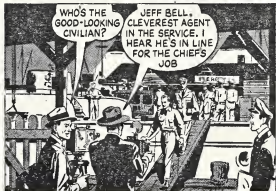


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Vol. 62

CONTENTS FOR MARCH, 1950

No. 3

## 1—THUNDERING NOVEL OF THE BANGTAIL BUDDHA—1

*Galloping down a bloody trail was—*

Mr. Maddox' Haunted Horse.....T. T. Flynn 10

Mr. Maddox tackled a racetrack demon—that tried to cash in on murder.

## 2—THRILL-PROPELLED DETECTIVE NOVELETTES—2

*Her dearly departed left a—*

Lethal Legacy for the Lady.....Hank Searls 56

Holding a blonde club over Shamus Blair's head was a double-crossing muscleman.

*Tired of killing? Have—*

A Corpse on Me!.....John D. MacDonald 78

The blonde jailwren wouldn't sing for the private op—nor his enemies' hungry guns.

## 3—CRIME-ADVENTURE STORIES OF MYSTERY—3

*Even a rusty ticker is—*

Better Late Than Cadaver.....Ellis G. Curtis 36

When the cops wouldn't buy Penny's tale of mayhem, she let nature take its corpse.

*To the toughs' everlasting regret—*

The Kids Weren't Kidding.....Richard E. Glendinning 45

Death made a pig of itself—when young Robbie tangled with the bolita yeggs.

*He nursed his grudge into a—*

Bedside Murder.....Don James 71

Ex-dick Ridley aimed to give the ruthless slayer—a dose of his own medicine.

*AND—*

*We want to know if you're*

Ready for the Rackets.....A Department 6

The lowdown on currently popular swindle schemes. Here's a chance to test your ability as a reporter and win \$5.00 at the same time.

The April Thrill Docket (Illustrated).....8

Here's the pitch on Scott O'Hara's livewire circus novel, "Blood On The Midway."

The April issue will be out March 3rd

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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## Ready for the Rackets A Department

Dear Detective Fans:

Don't let any swindlers put the skids under you. There's one sure method by which they can inveigle any sucker—unless you scotch their hopes by simply being smart . . . and reading the fine lines in any contracts you sign. Don't take it for granted that there's nothing important in the small type—because that's where the jokers will be spelled out to trap you.

In most cases where a petty racketeer gets the better of you, it's merely the result of such carelessness—or of not knowing better. That's why we print this column. Ready for the Rackets is here to help you protect yourself, for in these pages we print the news of the slick schemes that are currently making the rounds, the cheap tricks that wrong-guys may try to pull on you.

Also, we have another way of helping you. If we print the letters you send in, telling of your own personal experiences with con men of all kinds, we will send you \$5.00 for every letter used. Naturally, we'll withhold your name if you wish. However, no letters will be returned, unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Of course you understand that because of the press of mail in the office, we can't enter into personal correspondence regarding your letters.

Be sure to address all letters to The Rackets Editor, care of DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, New York.

Now, let's see what some of the recent rackets are:

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A new type of penny ante swindle has been making its way across the country. The individual person may only lose his nickle, but unless you are aware of what is going on, those in the racket will collect a great many nickles.

Formerly used in pay telephone slots, the racket has spread to the newer type of juke boxes. The gang members go to juke box locations and stuff cotton or paper up in the coin return slot. At regular intervals they return to the juke boxes, remove the stuffing and collect the nickles that should have been returned to you, if your record failed to play.

So, any time money should be returned to you

(Please continue on page 98)

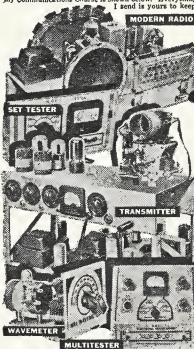


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# DOCKET



Brenda, the new target girl, moved into the knife-thrower's shiv. But she was too scared to tell carny-manager Jerry why she aimed to commit suicide.



Then the bicycle girl was murdered—and Brenda got hysterical. Just as she started spilling the dope, a knife flew through the tent flap, nailing her . . . dead.



The cops nosed it around that Brenda was alive and would name the would-be killer. Then somebody knocked over a trailer—onto the luscious decoy's hospital bed.



They opened Brenda's suitcase, to find—"Blood On The Midway"—Scott O'Hara's livewire circus novel . . . in the April issue, published March 3rd.



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**By T. T.  
FLYNN**



*The gun muzzle prodded  
against Mr. Maddox' spine.*

# **MR. MADDOX' HAUNTED HORSE**



*When a Kentucky belle's horse turned killer...*

*Mr. Maddox had to find its human demon—*

*or make book on murder.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Murder on the Hoof

THE horses were running in Maryland, and trouble had shipped in. Mr. Maddox had a quick uneasy hunch, when he saw the man's face bashed in, and what was left go sprawling helplessly in blood, cinders and dust.

It happened at Laurel Track, between Washington and Baltimore, at the railroad unloading platform. Spectators had

drifted to the spot to see a horse unloaded. Mr. Maddox had come to study the horse and speak with a girl. Five would get you fifty Dalla Dobson was a better bargain than any horse.

Dalla was a sun-brushed Kentucky lovely. Her husband owned the horse, and was not there. Gregg Dobson was seldom there any more, gossip said on the stable lines.

This morning brown jodhpurs sheathed Dalla Dobson's slim straight legs and flat pliant hips. Her golden, brushed-wool

sweater snugged to smooth shoulders. Lustrous black hair set off a warm friendly mouth, and a kind of nervous brooding lurked in Dalla's dark clear eyes. Mr. Maddox wondered if a small purplish bruise on Dalla's left cheekbone had anything to do with her brooding look.

The panting engine backed the steel car alongside the loading platform. Dalla watched closely as Pat Hanley, the rather young trainer of the Dobson racing string, walked to the car door.

The spectators were at the foot of the cleared platform ramp. A few trainers and owners were there, a sports writer, and two newspaper camera men. Several clockers had strolled over. Sam Cannon, the Dobson contract jockey was there.

The car door rumbled back and Hanley stepped inside. A bugling blast of equine temperament met him. Shod hoofs stamped the straw litter in the car.

Bill Kelly, of the *Washington Globe*, spoke with a smile. "What is he—horse or acrobat?"

Mr. Maddox, standing beside Dalla Dobson, spoke on an impulse. He wanted to see what Dalla would do. "Could be the horse is haunted."

A muscle jumped in Dalla's smooth neck. She started a quick turn of her head, and then pulled her glance back to the horse car and stood as if nothing had been said.

Kelly took it up though, jeering, "Haunted? A horse haunted?"

Mr. Maddox, large and impressive and usually genial, chuckled now. "Haunts haunt houses—why not horses?"

Kelly's retort was heartfelt. "You haunt me, Maddox, every time I think of a horse or a bet."

That brought smiles. There was a Maddox racing stable of four horses. But anyone who mattered in racing knew Joe Maddox as bookmaker to the high-rollers of the turf, those large betters who never weakened the odds by putting thousands through the mutuels.

Mr. Maddox chuckled again. "A chump who likes favorites in Number One post-position should be haunted."

The grins went to Kelly.

Dalla Dobson spoke sharply under her breath. "Are you trying to hang a jinx on me?"

Mr. Maddox said, "Just talking, Mrs. Dobson. Nothing wrong with your horse, of course."

"Certainly not." But temper had stained Dalla Dobson's cheeks.

Pat Hanley and one of the two grooms who had traveled from Kentucky, were leading Jubilo out of the car. The long, sleek, black thoroughbred paused in the sunlight and gazed out over the ramp and the spectators. He tossed his head and seemed to pose.

Flashbulbs winked. Admiring remarks were audible. There stood thirty thousand—offered and refused—in fine bloodlines and temperamental flesh. Stakes winner at two, stakes winner this year at three, Jubilo was entered for the Laurel stakes list. Then later to Bowle Track, a few miles away, before shipping south for the winter.

Dalla Dobson was intent, lips slightly parted as she watched.

On the other side of the ramp, a small man with a thin hatchet face was holding a large mustard-colored mongrel by an old rope leash, looped to the dog's collarless neck. The man was Oscar, Mr. Maddox' assistant.

Mr. Maddox glanced keenly at the dog, then watched Hanley and the groom lead the horse down the ramp, hoofs striking hollowly on the ramp boards.

As they came off the ramp, one of the flash-gun men called, "Hold him there! Turn him this way a little!"

The speaker stepped in closer, getting focus. The flashbulb of the other camera winked—and the horse seemed to explode in one spasm of great unleashed muscles. It was gruesome. Jubilo hadn't tossed a head or rolled an eye to warn of the quick fury dragging Hanley and the groom.

The big mongrel dog barked loudly and lunged so hard his rope tripped Oscar. Spectators were dodging back. Mr. Maddox caught Dalla Dobson's arm and swung her away.

The cameraman, intent on his focus, not hearing a warning, was there as the horse pivoted and kicked. Mr. Maddox heard a metal racing plate strike the camera. He saw the same battering hoof smash the face above the camera.

Dalla Dobson screamed.

But a man could die while a woman

screamed loud her terror. That one did.

There you had it in the bright clear sunshine, before witnesses who would swear it was an accident. But this was the second time death and the big black horse had looked each other in the eye.

The first time, a dog had died, over in the Bluegrass of Kentucky, and a horse's kick hadn't killed the dog. It had been found on the smooth green turf beyond the white-painted paddock fences of the Dobson breeding farm, a few days ago.

Just a dead dog. Still, the dog had been Jubilo's stall companion, friend and pal, such as many nervous thoroughbreds had.

But this dead one was a man, a jaunty flash-gun man. Now he was only an obituary, still earning his pay check. The second flash-gun man set off his winking bulb and got the picture of death. The dead one would scoop the press runs after all with his own photo.

And the horse . . . Jubilo quieted as suddenly as he had exploded, and walked on placidly.

**N**O PANIC now; these were racetrack men, newspaper men. One of the first to kneel by the body lifted his voice in flat harshness. "Neck's broken. He's gone."

Dalla Dobson said thinly, "Oh, Lord!" It was a small prayer, grief, fright, uncertainty. . . . She looked after her horse, looked at the knot of men around the body. White, uncertain. . . .

"You can't help," Mr. Maddox told her. "Get going."

He said it while watching a stranger, a man he'd never seen before. Wiry as a whippet in deep-pleated brown sports slacks, the fellow had been loitering in the background as if, in passing, he'd stopped to watch.

He was frowning. Slowly he lit a cork-tipped cigarette. That was when Mr. Maddox sighted the sharp profile behind the hand cupping the match.

The profile smiled the slightest bit, as if satisfied about something. Then the match was flipped away, smoke sucked deep, and the man himself walked away.

Mr. Maddox lifted his voice slightly. "Oscar!"

Oscar came over dragging the mongrel, slapping dirt from his trousers. "Tripped

me," Oscar said with a jaundiced look at the dog. "How about getting rid of this pooch? He don't make sense anyway."

"Hang on to him; I want Pop Harvey to keep him." Dalla Dobson had moved toward the body. Mr. Maddox spoke for Oscar's ear alone. "Follow those brown slacks. See where they go. Find out who the fellow is, if you can. Don't let him make you."

Oscar had come through life the hard way. He made mistakes. But he had his shrewdness, sharpness too, and always a loyalty to Joe Maddox. "Okay," Oscar said, and walked away with the dog.

Bill Kelly spoke to Sam Cannon, the jockey. "How you going to like riding that one?"

Cannon, in middle twenties, lacked the strained gaunt look of making weight. He was a natural hundred and eight. His shrug was unworried now. "I sit upstairs, not on his heels," Sam Cannon said.

Kelly came on to Mr. Maddox, with his raw-boned Irishman's look, jaw angular, and just missing ugliness in the scratchy tough line of his mouth and slightly awry nose. Now Kelly grinned without mirth. "Could be you were right, Maddox, about a haunted horse."

"It's a thought."

"Only one thing screwy about it," Kelly said with the same mirthless grin. "How in hell did you know?"

"Just talking, Kelly."

"Just," said Kelly. "And how right you were."

"You say so."

"Well—how right, Joe? What was behind that crack you made?"

"What could be?"

"Look," said Kelly. Tough devils were stirring back in his rust-flecked eyes. "I played poker with that guy, plenty. At his house. I've seen him kiss his two kids good night. His wife made the eats for us and opened the beer. Now she'll have to kiss the kids good night and there won't be any snacks to fix. And I'm the guy who'll probably have to dial her phone and tell her so. Was anything behind that crack about the horse being haunted?"

"She'll need money quick," Mr. Maddox guessed.

"Probably."

Mr. Maddox thumbed two five-hun-

dred dollar bills from his thick billfold. "I'll start it."

"I'll take it to her," said Kelly. The devils were nearer in his flecked eyes. "It wouldn't be conscience money, Joe? For anything?"

"It wouldn't."

"My mistake," Bill Kelly said. "I never knew a bookie who had a conscience." He turned away, a tough Irishman, striking out because he had to pick up a telephone quick now and speak his message to a widow.

Mr. Maddox turned the other way, somber in thought as he walked without visible haste. His destination was the deserted end of the long platform. Before he arrived there, an undersized man with ginger-colored beard stubble sidled around the end of the platform, cast a quick look, and veered off, walking faster.

Mr. Maddox called, "Want to earn a ten-spot?" The man turned uncertainly, and Maddox said, nearer now, "I'm not a cop. Name's Joe Maddox."

"So what?" A hard-seamed face looked Mr. Maddox over resentfully. Red veins cross-hatched the pudgy nose and nested wrinkles ran out from button-eyes squinting with caution. "Through you were a railroad bull. What's the pitch over there?"

"You're a carny man," Mr. Maddox guessed from the word *pitch*.

He got a shrug back, a suspicious demand. "What gets me ten?"

"How did the Dobson horse travel?"

"How should I know?"

"That horse just kicked a man and killed him," Mr. Maddox said coldly. "You were hanging around the door on the other side of the car when it happened. I saw your feet when you dropped out, just before the trainer walked in from this side."

"So what? Maybe I did; maybe I didn't. What's all that to me?"

"So for ten, how did the horse travel?"

"No trouble, if you got to have some kind of an answer."

"How'd you happen to be in the car?"

The coat over the stranger's left arm mismatched his wrinkled trousers. On the bum, Mr. Maddox decided, and evidently not a racetrack man. The name of Joe Maddox had meant nothing to him.

The man pulled a crumpled pack of cigarettes and a book of matches from his coat pocket. He lit a cigarette, bright button-eyes studying the big prosperous figure.

MR. MADDOX plucked a thick dark cigar from the front of his coat. "Match?" he requested, and he took the book of matches, lit the cigar, and tapped the advertisement on the cover. "Pete's Steak House, Lexington, Kentucky." He handed the matches back. "You on the Dobson payroll?"

"I wouldn't lie about it, mister. I hung an oat bag over my face an' they thought I was another horse. How much more do you want for ten?"

"What would fifty get me?"

"What should it get?"

"How did the horse travel?" Mr. Maddox asked again.

"Like I said, no trouble."

"What would a hundred get me?"

"Same thing."

Mr. Maddox thumbed a ten from his thick billfold. There were hundreds, five hundreds and thousand-dollar bills in the fat pin-seal wallet. It was not accident he let the bright squinting eyes sight the contents.

He thought for a moment it would work. It was like watching a man teeter on a wire, holding breath for the fall that might be coming.

Then a grimy hand went out and took the ten. Almost snatched it. Eating money, booze money; he took the ten and let the fifty, the hundred go, not even stalling to pry it loose. But he was hungry for more; the hunger and a kind of muddy greed grew in his look.

"Your name's Maddox?"

"Yes. Hotel Royale in Washington, or the Maddox stable here at the track. My trainer can always get me."

A two-inch pencil stub wrote *Mdx, Royale*, inside the paper cover of the match book.

"Got a name?" Mr. Maddox inquired.

"Plenty names." Matches back in the coat pocket, money in hand. The grin in the ginger-colored stubble came impudently, close to a sneer. "Make it Percy Brown."

Percy Brown jerked a thumb up in



parting salute and walked away, jauntily now, a man who'd rather lie for ten than for fifty or a hundred. But a man tempted hard, and finally keeping a string to the money, with *Mdx, Royale*, inside the matchbook cover, and not at all interested in going over to look at the dead man. What could you make of it?

Mr. Maddox walked back toward the ramp, frowning. Even now he knew little, and there was not much he could do. News of the cameraman's death had spread swiftly; already a small crowd was at the spot and more were coming, some running.

Oscar had vanished. The siren of the track ambulance wailed in the distance. Bill Kelly elbowed through the curious. "Joe, who was your friend?"

"What friend?"

"Guy you were talking to down the line there."

"Never saw him before. I got a match from him."

"Sure—a match," Kelly said, and his tone scratched with a kind of held-in fury. "I saw you reach in your coat and grease him with folding paper. For a match," Kelly said.

"What else?" Mr. Maddox asked mildly. This was no time for smiling. Kelly was a sensitive man, with the devil's own job to do at the telephone. It was eating at him, and his nose for news had caught some stink of suspicion. Not the time to trade temper with Kelly either. "He looked like a bum, broke. I gave him ten, Kelly."

"Old St. Nick!" Kelly said, and the tough line of his mouth was not admiring. "Passing it out every time you turn

around. I wonder, Joe; I keep wondering."

Kelly turned back to the fast-growing crowd. He was a good newspaper man. But what would it get Kelly? Mr. Maddox wished he knew. Like Kelly, he had a hunch something was wrong; something dangerous was happening. This dead man wouldn't be the last of it.

A dead dog in Kentucky, a dead man here, a stranger looking satisfied about it. Not much, but it added up. And there was Percy Brown, if Percy liked the name. He'd taken the ten, and sliced himself off at the pockets on crisp folding money. Why would a bum do that?"

The bum thought he had something to peddle for more than fifty or a hundred. No-sale for it, and he'd be back, fishing for the folding money in the fat pin-seal billfold.

Mr. Maddox would have liked to have tailed Percy Brown. He let it pass, guessing the time would be wasted. He had bait in his pocket. Powerful bait, when the corner of a thousand-dollar bill was thumbled up, while ten was being passed.

Meanwhile, Oscar might bring back something.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Spoor of a Slayer

TALK of the accident was humming through the shedrows in the stable area. Swipes, exercise boys, even trainers and owners, were strolling by the Dobson stalls.

In the shedrow directly opposite, Mr. Maddox sat on a bale of hay and watched

## MAN FROM MISSOURI ASKED TO BE SHOWN!



**And He Was!  
Carl W. Rau Has  
Now Switched to  
Calvert Because  
it Tastes Better.**

ST. LOUIS, MO.—Carl W. Rau, Missouri chemical engineer, is no longer a skeptic about the big switch to Calvert. "Friends showed me," he said. "Calvert really does taste better, really is smoother any way you drink it."

them pause curiously at the closed doors of Jubilo's stall. Pop Harvey, gaunt, gray-haired trainer of the Maddox stable, sat on the other end of the alfalfa bale, tobacco bulging his left cheek.

"Accidents happen," said Pop, and leaned over and spat. "Can't tell what a hot-blood hoss'll do. The feller shoulda been watchin'."

"You say Mrs. Dobson is over there?"

"Talkin' with Hanley in the tack room."

Pop looked to the right, and adjusted the steel-rimmed spectacles that drooped one-sided on his thin nose. Pop chortled, lifted his voice. "Which'n is the dog?"

Oscar joined them, the big yellow mongrel tugging at the old rope leash. "You figure it," Oscar said a trifle sourly, and dropped the rope into Pop's gnarled hand.

"Keep him with the horses, Pop," Mr. Maddox said, and looked inquiry at Oscar.

"A green coupe," Oscar said. "Flash job, District of Columbia tags. He climbed in and drove away."

"Speak to anyone?"

"Never looked back," Oscar dropped down on the middle of the alfalfa bale. "I read his tag."

"Good."

Pop scratched the mongrel behind the ears. "This'n oughta have a tag. A nice collar too."

"Get him a saddle," said Oscar. "So, Joe, I detour by the telephone, an' call the District License Bureau. The green coupe with those tags, they say, is from a gent named Santone."

Mr. Maddox sat motionless on the end of the alfalfa bale. His broad bland face did not change as he contemplated the stalls across the way.

"Ernie Santone?"

"You didn't miss," Oscar assented.

Mr. Maddox heaved to his feet with a grunt, and stood big and genial for the moment, as if good news had happened. "That wasn't Ernie Santone you tailed."

"I read the tag right. It was his coupe," Oscar insisted.

"Ernie must have sent someone to watch the horse unloaded, then get back and report."

"Report what?" challenged Oscar.

"Not that guy who was killed. Ain't

anyone—I mean anyone—could know that guy was going to get clipped. It just happened."

The brief good-nature faded off Mr. Maddox' broad face. "So we start wondering why Ernie Santone was interested. What was important enough about the Dobson horse to send a man out here to the track to watch? Wait here." Mr. Maddox headed across to the Dobson stalls.

The sweet pungency of horses, of straw and fine oiled leather tack filled the sunshine. Mr. Maddox breathed deeply of it, as if crowding out the taint of Ernie Santone, who was suddenly very rank in this business.

Santone ran the Valley Club, probably the best of its kind between New York and Florida. Fine food, good music and dancing; strictest culling at the door; strangers by introduction only. Gambling was in a wing back of the main house, which had been an old Georgian mansion.

In that luxurious, fully air-conditioned wing, lacking even a window to the outside, the chief of an embassy could lose his chips as smoothly as straight society or the higher echelons of Washington officialdom. Ernie, of course, didn't own the place. He probably had a piece of it, and a cut on the profits. You'd have to look to New York, Chicago, Nevada, California, for the other backers. The Valley Club was big-time, with bank-roll protection behind it.

The Dobson tack-room door was closed. Mr. Maddox turned the knob, and walked in. Any good-nature in his glance chilled as Dalla Dobson turned out of Pat Hanley's arm and sat down in a canvas chair, handkerchief balled in her hand.

Red flooded Hanley's lean cheeks. His bleached-bitter look was resentful. "What's the idea of running in this way?"

"Cool off and wipe the lipstick from your face," Mr. Maddox said coldly. Pat Hanley swung at him in sudden fury. Mr. Maddox blocked fast, stepping back, and Dalla left the chair and ran between them.

"Pat, are you crazy?"

Hardly thirty, Pat Hanley was young to be training. Lanky, not unhandsome, light-brown hair tumbled to the sunburn line on his forehead. The touch of lipstick was scarlet on the brown of his

cheek. And the bitterness frosted at Mr. Maddox as Hanley, breathing hard, said, "Keep your snide cracks in, Maddox! What do you want?"

"Information."

"Nothing to say."

"I'll say it," Mr. Maddox said. "A friend of my trainer drove in from Kentucky yesterday, and left some gossip before he went on to New York. Your Jubilo went a little lame at Chicago and was shipped back to the farm. About the time they started to wind him up again on the farm training track, he began having unruly spells. Sometimes it was at night, and sometimes his stall dog would howl. The old-timers among the hands started whispering about a haunt in the barns. Then the dog was found dead. That cinched the talk of a haunt. Now a man is dead. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, Maddox. The horse is all right. Nervous is all." Hanley had scrubbed his handkerchief across his cheek. "What business is it of yours?"

"Horses are my business. I don't want something screwball running loose in one of the stake races here. Could cost me money."

Dalla said, "That crack about a haunt could cost us money. It's confidential, but we've been thinking about selling Jubilo." Dalla's smile was bitter too. "And not because anything is wrong with him. We need the money."

"Gregg Dobson needs money?"

"The way he's been spending it, yes," Dalla said. "I'll have to trust you not to speak of it."

"All I wanted was information about the horse. Nothing else interests me."

He left that with them and walked out. He'd meant to say more; the lipstick and the arm around Dalla had finished that idea. Mr. Maddox breathed deep of the horses and leather in the sunshine outside. That tack-room scene was ranker than Ernie Santone. She had a husband.

LATER that night, in his suite at the Royale, Mr. Maddox had a nightmare. He dreamed of a horse that was haunted, a great black steed racing wildly through a ghost-moon sky, bat-like haunts sweeping close, and in the background a dog howling. It was a grade-A night-

mare, not helped by the unmistakable figure of newspaperman Bill Kelly sitting on a star and leering knowingly.

The sharp ring of the bedside telephone brought reality. Mr. Maddox heaved up, blinking, and fumbled for the handset. He noticed that the sun was not long up; then Pop Harvey spoke in his ear.

"I wake you up, Joe?"

"Did me a favor," Mr. Maddox said, recalling the nightmare.

"I got bad news, Joe. That there dog—"

"Dead!" Mr. Maddox guessed, instantly wide-awake.

"Yep. He howled a coupla times last night, Joe. Musta been sick. Found him dead when I rolled out." Pop was apologetic. "I sure hate it—"

Mr. Maddox cut in again; he'd swung over on the edge of the bed; his broad face was hard, voice harder. "What time did he howl?"

"Kinda early in the evenin'."

"Where was he?"

"That empty stall next to Lulu Belle. Had him tied in there with plenty clean straw for a bed."

"He didn't run out any?"

"Nope," said Pop. "Kept him on the rope all the time. That's where I found him this mornin'. He didn't want to run away. Looked like he knowed he'd hit a soft spot."

"Did you feed him?"

"Yep."

"How did he howl? What did it sound like?"

"Nothin' much. Kinda bark, kinda howl. Sounded like he was lettin' off some steam. I didn't pay him no mind at the time."

"The top door of his stall was open," Mr. Maddox guessed.

"Didn't see any sense in closin' it, Joe."

"Get the vet and tell him I want to know why the dog died," Mr. Maddox directed. "Any tests he needs to make. And, Pop, don't talk around about it. Keep the veterinary business quiet."

"You think he was poisoned, Joe?"

"What else?" Mr. Maddox said.

He was scowling as he stood up. Three now. Two dogs, one man. The first two could have been accidents. But not this one. Something colder than the crisp

morning air was in the room, something grimmer than the nightmare of a haunted horse.

Before he went down for breakfast, Mr. Maddox gave Oscar orders for the day.

"Stick around your telephones. If a man named Percy Brown tries to get in touch with me, don't brush him off. Get him up here if you can, and get word to me fast. Tell him there's five hundred getting lonesome for a man named Percy. . . ."

Breakfast in the oak-beamed coffee shop promised a better start for the day. Nothing nightmarish about double ham-and-eggs, quart of orange juice, chilled melon, toast and large pot of coffee, until Mr. Maddox glanced at Kelly's sports column in the *Globe*.

"Joe Maddox, widely known turf character, was speaking of haunted horses just before Gregg Dobson's Jubilo got out of hand yesterday while being unloaded, and brought about the tragic death of cameraman Keith Summervale. Odds are being offered as to what was in Maddox' mind, and whether he can call future shots as accurately."

It said nothing; it said everything. Kelly had written only the truth, bitterly, savagely, and left the name of Maddox dangling.

The voice that spoke in Mr. Maddox' left ear had a strong note of suspicion. "Well, Joe, how about it?"

Mr. Maddox pushed back his ham-and-eggs, appetite gone. "I keep hoping it's going to be a good day," he remarked dismally. "Good-by, Cassidy."

The hum of the busy coffee shop had masked Cassidy's arrival. The Masterton cop took the other chair now, a big man with grizzled temples above a squarish face. "You called it right yesterday, Joe. How come you were Joey-on-the-spot?"

"Any law against it?"

"Not kibitzers," Cassidy said. "Not haunts, either. But dead guys, Joe; the law don't like dead guys." Cassidy broke off a corner of toast and chewed it slowly. "We don't like haunts in the Bluegrass either. Or dead dogs."

"Snooping on that, are you?"

"Got an agency man at Lexington, Kentucky, keeps check on that Bluegrass section, Joe. He just telephoned the barn

gossip he picked up about that horse. And, *smack*, in our paper, is Joe Maddox, neck-deep in it. Like Old Man Haunt himself."

"The hell with haunts," said Mr. Maddox. "And you too, Cassidy."

"Haunts, Joe. don't haunt horses."

"Tell it to Kelly."

"The hell with Kelly. I smell something in this that ain't Kentucky roses!"

Mr. Maddox pushed back his chair. "Follow your nose," he invited, and left Cassidy there to finish the breakfast if he wanted it.

Not so good, Cassidy blundering about. Meanwhile, it was another busy day. Pop Harvey telephoned the vet's report just before Mr. Maddox started to the track. Strychnine, the vet said, probably tossed to the dog sometime during the night, in a bit of meat.

**I**N GRANDSTAND and clubhouse that afternoon Mr. Maddox looked for Percy Brown. No luck. He talked with a clocker who said Jubilo had breezed a fast half that morning, and looked fit. Sam Cannon, in the irons, had had no trouble with the horse. Pat Hanley had stated Jubilo would start in the Bayside Handicap. Saturday. Dalla and Hanley were in the clubhouse together. They saw Mr. Maddox and ignored him.

A wasted day, Mr. Maddox thought, as he drove toward Washington in the heavy traffic on the Baltimore-Washington Boulevard. He still thought so at eight o'clock as he dined leisurely at his favorite restaurant. Leon, serving him as usual at an inconspicuous table in a rear corner, plugged a table telephone into the wall and withdrew. This often happened, and as usual, Oscar was calling.

"Joe, that Percy Brown just telephoned. Sounded like he was loaded to the gills."

Alert, immediately, Mr. Maddox demanded, "What did he say? Is he coming to the hotel?"

"I don't know where he's going," said Oscar. "But I can wish. I told him you were out, and five hundred was looking for him. I thought that got him. Then he started cussing. He said you were playing piker, and to hell with you. If you'd go that high, someone else might

top it. That's what the drunk said."

"Who?" Mr. Maddox demanded quickly.

"He didn't say."

"I wondered how clever he'd try to get," Mr. Maddox growled. "Did you tilt the ante?"

"You didn't tell me to," Oscar reminded defensively. "I told him Joe Maddox didn't pike on a deal, and to come up to the suite and see. But the guy was crooked and feeling good enough to be nasty. 'Tell Maddox to sit on his pennies,' he says, 'while I grab a taxi to headquarters and get the auction going.' Then he hung up."

"Where was he calling from?"

"Sounded like a joint; a juke box was going. I'd guess it was in town somewhere."

"He's not boozing and riding taxis on the ten I gave him yesterday," Mr. Maddox decided flatly. "The damn fool! He's trying to boost the ante on murder!"

The wire fell silent. Then Oscar's thin demand came in mounting sharpness. "*Murder?*"

"Our dog got it, didn't he?" Mr. Maddox was patting for a cigar, mechanically.

"That ain't a man," Oscar argued.

"Be patient."

Oscar still wanted to argue. "A guy don't find murder around headquarters."

Mr. Maddox tapped the cigar end on the white linen beside the telephone. He wasn't arguing with Oscar; he was thinking aloud.

"He didn't mean Police Headquarters. No money there for him. If he knows something worth cash, he'll go personally to collect. I can almost guess where he's going, and if he draws a pay-off there, I want to sit in and know why."

Oscar's uneasiness was mounting. "Why not mind your own business, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox snapped, "I don't like people who poison dogs. If that lush telephones again, try to learn where he's staying."

Mr. Maddox cut the connection. He glanced at his wristwatch, looked regretfully at the second table of good food he was leaving today. His signal brought the check. He was tight-lipped, hurrying, as he went out to his car.

Guilt had been uncovered if someone

had already passed hush money to that seedy bum. But what guilt? What had been worth taking ten and leaving fifty or a hundred yesterday? What would make a drunk angrily refuse five hundred tonight?

Mr. Maddox drove the purring blue convertible up Connecticut faster than the traffic rate and groped for answers. Percy Brown had talked like an old carnival hand. If so, his wits were sharp enough. He knew something. He meant to cash in on it.

The convertible rolled over Rock Creek Park Bridge, and on up the avenue. This trip could be wasted time. Mr. Maddox wasn't even certain he was going to the right place. He hadn't taken time to check in the telephone directory.

He turned right, drove half a block, parked against the curb, went on afoot. This street dead-ended in the great forested ravine of Rock Creek Park, which drew its clotting shadows and night-loneliness through the thickly inhabited heart of the city.

A long time ago the elder Dobson had built a Washington home on the edge of the ravine. Gregg Dobson had inherited the elaborate Victorian-style mansion in this section. Gregg and his young wife, Dalla, split time between the Washington house and Kentucky farm, Mr. Maddox had heard.

Years ago he had been to this house once, in daylight. Now he passed murky illumination under a street light. Percy Brown had said he'd catch a taxi. If this was his destination, he could hardly have arrived before now.

A car turned into the dead-end street. Might be the taxi. But it swung quickly into a driveway. The faint, cool smell of trees and forest mold and dampness out of the ravine lay in the quiet street now.

A window here and there was lighted. Half a moon silvered the sky, and outlined dark tops of towering forest trees growing up the steep sides of the ravine just ahead.

The last thing on this side should be an old wrought-iron gate arch, and the driveway going in to the right, descending a little through shrubbery, hedges, flower beds, to the turning circle in front of the house.

It was all there, just short of the safety

fence and luminous marker of the dead-end. And across the street, pointing back toward Connecticut Avenue, parked with lights out, was a long powerful coupe. Just enough moonlight to pick out the model lines and make reasonably certain of the color.

That was the moment Mr. Maddox wished he'd brought a gun. A green coupe. Flash job.

There could be two, a dozen, like it in Washington. But this one didn't look good, parked quietly, darkly, in that spot. Impossible to see whether anyone was inside, without crossing the street and peering in.

Mr. Maddox continued his easy stride, and glanced at the mail box beside the driveway entrance. It bore a number and the name G. Dobson.

He took the old flagstone path beside the driveway, not looking back at the parked automobile.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Bum's Pay-off

THE city seemed cut off, wilderness close on the left, frogs calling, crickets droning in the ravine far below the edge of the property. Big trees grew around the house; hedges cut in front, screening the long wide old-fashioned veranda from the street.

Mr. Maddox walked on the thick turf beside the flagstones, making no noise. He hadn't meant to come on the property this way unless a taxi rolled in, or the bum arrived and tried to walk in. But that parked green coupe had turned him in.

A few lights were on in the house. A sedan stood before the steps. Mr. Maddox moved over in blacker shadows between clumps of shrubbery and waited, munching patiently on an unlighted cigar. If Percy Brown arrived, good. If he didn't, it was a fair hunch gone wrong. More time wasted.

Meanwhile, that parked job cried for explanation.

Minutes dragged. . . . An automobile drove to the dead-end and swung into the driveway. Mr. Maddox stepped fast behind more shrubbery, deeper in the

shadows, before headlights struck him.

The auto stopped, backed around, went back along the street. Some stranger trapped in the dead-end, evidently. There'd been no sound of a car door opening or closing, or voices, or movement along the flagstones.

Mr. Maddox paced slowly, patiently, over the soft turf between concealing shrubbery. There didn't seem to be a dog. He considered lighting the cigar.

Then he halted in mid-step as a gun muzzle jabbed his spine. The voice was metallic, hammering with a kind of mounting fury. "Don't move!" A flashlight beam flicked on, off. "Maddox! I thought so! I've been watching you!"

Something familiar about that voice, and the anger behind it. Then memory clicked.

"Pat Hanley!" Mr. Maddox said.

"Some fools never learn to keep their noses out of other people's business!" Pat Hanley said. At least the voice didn't deny it was Hanley. The anger, thick now, said, "This should teach you!"

Mr. Maddox was already pivoting, driving right arm back to knock the gun away, gambling Hanley wouldn't kill, if it was Hanley—and knowing ruefully he'd been caught off-base, illegally prowling the Dobson property.

The gun was snatched away from his back as he started the move. The night sky fell on him with a terrific concussion. He saw the stars flying. . . .

When he opened his eyes, the stars and sky were up where they belonged. He was on his back and could see them. The lump and hurt on the right side of his head told what had happened. He must have ducked around into the blow; got it twice as hard, probably.

He staggered a little when he stood up. Queerly enough, he'd been left where he dropped. The frogs, crickets and damp cool night were the same.

The illuminated dial of his wrist watch said over half an hour had passed. The sedan was gone from in front of the house. He picked up his hat, wincing, and walked to the street. Movement cleared some of the dizziness away.

The green coupe was gone.

Mr. Maddox lighted a cigar and walked to the opposite curb where the green



job had been parked. Just blank curb there now. He tried to think with an aching head.

Something was wrong with the night. He breathed deeply, then sniffed hard. The damp woods odor out of the deep Rock Creek ravine was rank with whiskey taint. The half-moon was higher, clearer. It glinted on glass in the middle of the street.

The blacktop pavement was wet around the glass. A touch of a fingertip, a sniff. . . . A whiskey pint had dropped and broken.

Mr. Maddock walked back to the Dobson house, striding faster as his head cleared and slow-burning anger began to heat through his big frame. His heels beat solidly across the wide veranda. The old-fashioned cast-bronze lion's-head door knocker was still in place. He ignored the more modern bell plate at the side and slammed the knocker hard. After a moment, he slammed it harder.

He was big and ominously calm when a short, slender, white-coated Filipino house-boy opened the door.

"I want to see Gregg Dobson."

"Not home, sir."

"Then Mrs. Dobson."

"Plis, sir. Not home either."

"When will they be home?"

"Can't say, sir." The boy shook his head, shrugged, to make it more emphatic.

"Did a drunk man come to the house in the last hour?"

"No, plis; no dronk man."

"Did Mrs. Dobson leave with Pat Hanley, her horse trainer?"

Another shrug, white teeth flashing apologetically, the door starting to close.

No more information here. The boy was getting uneasy.

"Tell Mrs. Dobson that Mr. Maddox called and will see her later."

"Yes, yes."

The door closed hard before Mr. Maddox reached the steps. The slow anger was still heating. He glanced again at the shattered whiskey bottle as he hurried toward his car. A few bits of broken glass, a damp label. The bits glinting in the thin moonlight looked sinister, symbolic.

OSCAR was slumped in an easy chair when Mr. Maddox stalked into their hotel suite, demanding, "Did Percy Brown telephone again?"

"Nope," denied Oscar. He sat erect, eyes widening, "Is that blood on your ear?"

"Probably," Mr. Maddox assented, stripping off his coat. "I was sluggish. And I'll lay even odds Percy Brown got it tonight. If he did, he may be carrying my name inside a match clip. I was where he was grabbed, and it can be proved."

Oscar forked uneasy fingers through his sandy hair. "Who'd kill him?"

"That," Mr. Maddox promised, "will be interesting. Help me change."

While hastily donning fresh linen and dark blue suit, Mr. Maddox told Oscar what had happened, and ordered, "If I don't report in by telephone in an hour and a half, I'll be in trouble. Call the police."

Oscar's uneasiness had become acute. "You may be wrong about this Percy Brown."

"I think he went to the Dobson house

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in a taxi, like he intended. And he left in the Dobson car or the green coupe, by force."

"Why was that horse trainer waiting out in the dark that way?"

"Hanley confuses everything," said Mr. Maddox with irritation. "It looks as if he's working against the Dobsons. But that I wouldn't have believed," said Mr. Maddox, thinking of the lipstick on Hanley's face in the Laurel tackroom.

Oscar knew of that too. "Gregg Dobson is chasing dames, they say. His wife chasing trainers, you say. Might be Hanley and the lady are ganging up on her husband. Or Hanley could be double-crossing her too. He could have come in Santone's car, to stop that lush getting to the Dobsons. Which means he's crooked."

"Exactly."

"And seeing Mrs. Dodson too," said Oscar.

"Seems so."

"What a man," said Oscar. "After everything in sight."

"He made one mistake," said Maddox coldly. "He left me there and lost his voice. . . ."

In the wooded, rolling Maryland countryside, a black-topped side road passed a gracious Georgian mansion, set well back among tall trees.

Mr. Maddox drove in and found several dozen automobiles in a parking space screened by high green hedges, dimly lighted by hooded bulbs on rustic poles.

At the house steps, two men in dinner jackets looked him over unobtrusively. No visible signal passed, but the door opened. A gray-haired dignified butler bowed him in.

Gilt-framed mirrors and faded old oils were on the paneled walls of the high-ceilinged reception hall. The gracefully curving main staircase was there, and a white-tie-and-tails was descending with a bright-smiling ash-blond. Talk, laughter, soft clatter of cutlery and china, and muted music, filled the old mansion.

One could come to the Valley Club, dine, dance, and leave, with few people the wiser, and gambling not even mentioned. Or one could follow the tails and the ash-blond back through a deep-carpeted corridor, dim-lighted.

Two more men sat in a small ante-room in quiet contemplation of nothing, bulges under their arms. A last heavy door opened soundlessly, and the large new wing at the back offered its delights.

Crystal chandeliers blazed with light. Carpeting was deep and soft. The ivory balls danced and clicked in the roulette wheels. Dice tumbled on the green fields of the long dice tables. Dead-pan stickmen chanted and raked dice, chips and crisp bills in methodical boredom.

Very swank, exciting, exclusive—and merely another joint to Mr. Maddox, fancied up for the fancier trade.

A tall man, with black smooth hair, loitering casually inside the door had hardware lumping under his left arm.

"Where's Santone?" Mr. Maddox inquired.

"In his office, there, sir."

The door in the corner was solid dark wood. Mr. Maddox walked in. The conceits of the establishment were carried out in the same dark paneling, brocade antique chairs, and a large old oil of English gentlemen riding to hounds.

But nothing antique in the startled, tightening resentment of Dalla Dobson, seated beside the desk, her drink on the desk edge, a cigarette in her fingers. Very chummy with Ernie Santone, seated behind the desk.

Mr. Maddox closed the door. Big and bland, he eyed them.

Ernie Santone stood up, tall, thin, dark. His nose was bold, mouth thin too, and wide. He was using an ivory cigarette holder in lean strong fingers.

He said, "Yes?" the tone rising in question.

Dalla Dobson ground her cigarette in an antiqued brass tray on the desk corner. "Are you always walking in?" she remarked resentfully.

Humor, hard, brusque, touched Mr. Maddox' broad face. "I get around. So do you, Mrs. Dobson. Queer places."

"My business." Strain pushed her pliant mouth into a bitter line.

Santone reached to the desk edge casually.

Mr. Maddox said, "Don't push it, Ernie. I've got a report dead-line waiting. I'm back smiling—or else."

The hand relaxed. Dalla Dobson's eyes

had widened as she looked at Santone. "Hanley here with you?" Mr. Maddox asked her.

Dalla stood up abruptly. "I've had enough of this."

Ernie Santone opened the door for her. "You can be sure I'll cooperate, Mrs. Dobson."

"I'll expect it," Dalla said.

Ernie closed the door. He was in dinner jacket, faultless and unruffled as he returned to the desk chair. "Something on your mind, Maddox?"

Mr. Maddox laughed at him, a broad shaking chuckle that narrowed Ernie's eyes in alertness.

"I let her walk out because you'll do alone," Mr. Maddox said. "You can stop the act. I'm not a customer." He looked at his wrist watch. His broad bland smile persisted. It made Ernie Santone uneasy; it made Ernie's pupils contract.

"That bum who was picked up at the Dobson place tonight," Mr. Maddox said. "If he's still alive, keep him alive."

Ernie inhaled deeply from his dead cigarette.

"Don't get rattled. Light it." Mr. Maddox chuckled.

Ernie said a four-letter word. He tossed the holder on the desk blotter and snatched a fresh cigarette from a tooled-leather box.

Not a customer who entered the place could have cracked his cold, professional calm. But the vast, bland assurance of Joe Maddox, who had matched wits with better men than Ernie Santone, had Ernie off-balance.

"What the hell are you talking about, Maddox? What bum? What Dobson place?"

Mr. Maddox chuckled again. "Sweat it. I like to see smooth ones like you drip."

Ernie got the cigarette going. He grew blank and quiet. "All news to me. I don't get your interest."

"Tell yourself Joe Maddox is interested. Keep telling yourself."

Ernie said in sighing regret, "What the hell! Nobody's been blotted as far as I know." Ernie hauled smoke deep in his lungs and fairly snorted it out. Angrily, "Where do you come in, tapping me?"

"Keep thinking about it." One of the thick dark cigars bounced on the desk blotter, and would have rolled off if Ernie hadn't caught it. Mr. Maddox bit the end off its companion. He used Ernie's silver desk lighter and turned to the door.

"Oh, Maddox." Ernie was breaking the expensive cigar in half, slowly, contemplatively. "If no one is rubbed, if everyone's happy, where does that leave you?"

"This ought to be good," Mr. Maddox invited. "Where does it leave me?"

Ernie tossed the cigar fragments in the square metal wastebasket. "Blanks in your gun. Keep it in mind, you fat slob!" Ernie said so mildly the restraint sounded thick and gagged.

MR. MADDOX laughed at him again and walked out. The swank suave veneer of the big gambling room closed in. And Mr. Maddox felt like swearing as he moved to the games, on the chance Dalla Dobson had lingered.

One bum, hard, cynical, crooked and drunk, would see another sunrise now, and never realize how lucky he was. The body wouldn't be found with, perhaps, *Mdx, Royale*, inside a matchbook cover—and Kelly, of the Globe, ready to swear Joe Maddox had passed money, and perhaps threat, to the fellow, at the Laurel unloading platform.

But even more important, Ernie Santone had been bluffed into showing his hand a little. Ernie was in this to his thin dark eyebrows . . . whatever it was.

The pale, indifferent croupier at the nearest wheel announced colorlessly, "The double-zero wins."

And the man who stepped from one of the other tables to Mr. Maddox' elbow, was Bill Kelly, smiling thinly, knowingly.

"Mrs. Dobson goes in and comes out; Maddox goes in and comes out," said Kelly. "Who's next?"

"Your turn," said Mr. Maddox blandly. "Lifting your social standing tonight?"

"I'll bathe when I get home, with extra soup for meeting you," said Kelly. "This is strictly Dobson-poking. The parade to Santone is extra dividend."

Mr. Maddox said nothing.

Watching narrowly, Kelly said, "Cocktail whispers to our society desk say Gregg Dobson has been losing heavily here on the wheels."

"Don't they all?"

"What I think," said Kelly, "is Dobson's going to be taken on the horses too. They'll handle any amount of horse money here."

"Could be."

"Society desks are handy," said Kelly. "They draw the dirt too. I'm told Gregg Dobson is here plenty with a wren named Lia Wentmore."

"Never heard of her."

"Papa is a high-class shyster lawyer who knows where important bodies are buried. He does well. Daughter does all right too. She plays the right people, and brings a lot of them here."

"It's been done. A shill is a shill."

Kelly said, "At the track the other morning, I didn't know all that. I doped it as Joe Maddox making a play at Mrs. Dobson's cash, someway. Then I hear this other. It suggests Dobson is getting his neck cut in this joint. So I check on that too. And *bang*—you're here with Santone. It really gets interesting."

"You forgot one thing; Mrs. Dobson was here too."

"All fits neatly," said Kelly. "I'd like to have seen her tag her husband tonight with the Wentmore babe, who I hear is sultry and high-pressure. Am I shaping up a news story?"

"Tell me when you get it."

Kelly's tough mouth grinned thinly. The devils were in his flecked eyes again. "With headlines," Kelly promised. "Because tomorrow I'm going to a funeral I don't think would have happened, if some easy-money grifters weren't trying an angle about a horse."

Hardness Kelly had not seen fell coldly on Mr. Maddox' broad face. "Don't push your luck, Kelly. I race horses and I lay cash money against other people's opinions about winners. I pay off and I play it straight."

"Have it your own way," said Kelly, shrugging, "until I have it my way."

That ended it. Mr. Maddox was sober as he started back to town. Kelly was dangerous; Kelly had stumbled on enough truth to drive him digging for more. And,

in aroused loyalty to a dead friend, Kelly was bent on finding guilt in Joe Maddox. A very little of Kelly's wrong kind of publicity could get a man ruled off the turf for life.

Mr. Maddox decided headlights were following him. He slowed. The lights slowed. Beyond Chevy Chase he wheeled into a filling station.

"Ten," he told the man, getting out. "And check the tires, too, while I use your telephone."

He watched the street through the open door as he dialed Oscar. A small gray sedan rolled in to the other side of the pumps, and Kelly got out.

"I'm coming in," Mr. Maddox said when Oscar answered.

"No trouble, Joe?"

"None. Turn in if you want to."

Kelly was at the front of Mr. Maddox' car, watching the man check under the hood. He grinned. "What I forgot to say out there was—well, hell! That money was appreciated. Summervale's wife said, 'Bless you,' from the bottom of her heart." Kelly's tough mouth kept the smile. "So—bless you—until something else turns up."

"Thanks, Kelly. You could have held out on that, feeling the way you do."

"I don't feel—I just call the score," said Kelly.

The station man was checking front tires. "Unlock your trunk and I'll get your spare," he called to Mr. Maddox.

Kelly stood there watching the man while Mr. Maddox stepped to the back, unlocked the luggage space and opened it. Then he stood very still.

The bum was there, very dead. His own necktie, new, cheap and flashy, was knotted deep in his swollen neck. The body had been doubled in feet first.

Kelly called, "Going to be at the workouts in the morning?" He was walking back to where Mr. Maddox stood.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Out on a Limb

PUTTING the lid down, Mr. Maddox spoke calmly, just as Kelly reached the rear fender. "I'll be at the track in the morning." The station

man stepped back with his air hose and Mr. Maddox told him, "The spare seems to be all right."

"I'll take five and my oil checked," Kelly decided.

Kelly's car was being serviced when Mr. Maddox drove on. Three blocks away he turned right at the corner. He drove four fast blocks and turned right again. Presently he pulled to the curb, cut the engine and lights, and watched for a tall to show.

They must have taken Percy Brown to the Valley Club, perhaps to be questioned by Ernie himself. Whatever the bum knew had been worth the risk of killing him. One bum, no friends, who cared? Who'd ask about him—until Joe Maddox walked in and asked?

No wonder it had put Ernie off-base. But he'd stacked and dealt off the bottom fast. Keys had been in Joe Maddox' car, on the parking area, guarded by one of Santone's men.

Now it was Joe Maddox' corpse to explain.

Mr. Maddox drove on, wanting a drink at the thought of trying to explain this particular corpse to Kelly. . . .

Oscar was asleep when Mr. Maddox returned to the hotel, and left a dawn call at the switchboard.

The telephone blasted him out, in an hour it seemed. The new sun was big and blazing in the east as he drove out the Washington-Baltimore Highway to Laurel.

The same sun was striking on the long damp roadside grass full twenty miles out in the country beyond the Valley Club, where someone would find the body any

minute now. Mr. Maddox regretted leaving the man that way. But now there was no match clip in the coat pocket. It had been there, overlooked, with *Mdr, Royale*, jotted inside the cover. Now it was burned. Someone had taken any money the man had been carrying. But he'd already bought new clothes. He'd been paid money for something.

Mr. Maddox parked behind the great drab Laurel grandstand, echoing now to the hammer of hoofs on the track and voices of railbirds and clockers at the fence. Horses, singly and bunched, were jogging around the track. Now and then one horse would break into fast racing stride for a workout, handily, breezing or driving, while binoculars watched and thumbs tensed on fine stopwatches.

These were the hours Mr. Maddox liked best. In the stable area to the left of the stands, stalls were being cleaned, horses washed and rubbed, hots being walked cool, feed distributed. Pop Harvey sighted Mr. Maddox' big figure coming along the shedrow.

"The Dobson gal's been askin' for you, Joe."

"She's coming over now," Mr. Maddox said. His board face set hard.

Dalla had on jodhpurs again, and a brown V-neck sweater. She made no pretense of smiling. "Pat told me what happened last night."

"I'll see him about it in a few minutes," Mr. Maddox promised coldly. "First I want to talk with the two grooms who brought your horse from Kentucky."

"Only one of them is here this morning."

"Which one?"



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"Frank Lasser, who helped unload Jubilo."

"Where's the other groom?"

"His name is Blount. He went to Washington yesterday, and didn't come back. Pat's going to fire him." Dalla's voice sharpened. She sounded almost harsh. "My husband is here to watch Jubilo's workout this morning. You can break up my marriage with a few words to him." Dalla took a deep breath. "Please don't."

"My business is horses," Mr. Maddox said curtly. "I don't tattle about lip-stick."

Dalla swallowed. "This is the truth. I was reared on the same mile of country road as Pat Hanley. If he comforts me when I'm feeling low, and I brush a kiss on his cheek, why, why—"

Mr. Maddox stared at her. His broad face grew more friendly. "I'll buy that explanation," he said. "It makes sense. But, sister, you and Ernie Santone at the Valley Club, doesn't make sense."

The flat harshness stayed in Dalla's voice. "Gregg has about bankrupt us by thinking he could beat roulette. Now he knows he can't. I went to the Valley Club to do a little gambling on something I know about. Horses. Pat Hanley drove me there. He was waiting outside the house for me last night, when he caught you skulking in the yard."

"What did he think I was doing there?"

"Following him; spying on him. Perhaps to—put pressure on him about a race. Or threaten to go to Gregg. How did Pat know what to think? There you were, spying. And then you followed us to the Valley Club."

Across the way they were saddling Jubilo, who looked big, sleek and full of fire this morning.

"You trust Hanley?" Mr. Maddox questioned.

"Absolutely."

"What about this gambling you're doing on horses?"

"I'm going to bet all I can raise that Jubilo wins tomorrow, and win back some of the money Gregg's lost on roulette."

"Does he know?"

"It was his idea." Dalla's mouth set. "And *I* bet it, so I'll know it goes on

Jubilo, and not on roulette in a weak moment."

"It was your husband's idea," Mr. Maddox said thoughtfully. "Anyone suggest it to him?"

"Possibly. Friends are always after us for a tip on a horse that is ready to win."

"And Santone is cooperating with you and any friends who want to bet?"

"That," said Dalla, "is the business he's in."

"How about the way Jubilo acted in Kentucky, and here the other morning?"

"He's extra high-strung; but he'll win tomorrow," Dalla said in confidence. "And I shouldn't be telling you."

Sam Cannon was up in the saddle. Gregg Dobson, a handsome rascal with a sulky mouth and shadows of blue bags under his eyes, called, "Coming, Dalla?"

Mr. Maddox said, "Tell that groom I want to talk to him."

Lasser, the groom, came over as Dalla followed the others to the track.

"LET'S watch this workout," said Mr. Maddox. As they moved toward the track, he inquired, "Where's your partner?"

A lanky, almost melancholy man, Lasser said: "He ain't my pardner. Don't know where he is. Fired now, I hear."

"Was he ever a carnival man?"

"One season he was in a circus. Worked around the horses."

"Was he near Jubilo much on the Kentucky farm?"

"Night man at the barns. He liked night work. Asked for it." Lasser grinned. "He was welcome to it."

"How about that third fellow who rode the car with you from Kentucky?"

Lasser was startled, then sheepish. "I thought he got out without being seen. He was Blount's friend. Busted and wanted to get here. No harm in it."

"Circus man too?"

"I think that's where Blount met him. They were talking about it."

"Blount give him any money?"

"Don't think so. We were both pretty busted. Didn't get paid until we got here."

"Did you see them together after the unloading?"

"Nope."



"Thanks. That's all," Mr. Maddox said, and went on alone to the track fence to watch the horses streaming by. The big black Dobson horse made a slow jogging circuit of the track and started another. He was going into the clubhouse turn when he swerved suddenly, pulled up and kicked. Sam Cannon was almost unseated. But in a moment he had the horse jogging again.

Mr. Maddox was already striding fast toward the grandstand. He went to the parking area behind the stands and leaned against a car fender, where he could watch automobiles arriving and departing. A few minutes later Cassidy found him there. The big Masterton detective was accusing.

"Did you see that Dobson horse kink at the turn?" Cassidy demanded.

"Haunts again?" Mr. Maddox inquired blandly.

"Dammit," Cassidy exploded, "haunts don't haunt horses! You were around this time too, Joe! And yesterday you lost a dog. Poisoned, same as that stable dog in Kentucky."

"Hundred reward if you find who did it," Mr. Maddox offered.

Bill Kelly joined them just then. He had a tight knowing smile. "So the Dobson horse saw the Evil-Eye again," said Kelly. "Is this haunt headquarters?"

"Ask the horse," Mr. Maddox suggested.

Another car drove off the parking area. A black sedan, driven by a wiry sharp-featured man, alone. He was the man who'd grinned behind his cupped match after the cameraman had been kicked.

Mr. Maddox watched the car out of sight and was satisfied. "Two hundred to the first one who brides the haunt," he offered, chuckling, and he left Cassidy and Kelly there to match wits if they chose. He had the lead now he wanted. During the twenty-odd mile drive back to Washington, Mr. Maddox thought hard. When he walked into the hotel suite, he had an order for Oscar.

"Telephone Stines, the track veterinarian, or some other vet," he told Oscar. "Find out what there is that a horse or a dog might notice, but a man wouldn't."

"Does that make sense?" Oscar demanded.

"It better," said Mr. Maddox, a trifle grimly. . . .

From his hotel that evening, at dinner time, Mr. Maddox telephoned Dalla Dobson at her home, and asked two questions. Dalla answered them. They hadn't heard from the missing groom. Jubilo would start in the sixth race tomorrow. Dalla added that her check for twenty-two thousand dollars had been sent to the Valley Club by messenger, confirmed by telephone, and receipt returned.

Minutes later Oscar answered the hard drum of knuckles on the door. Kelly walked in. The set of his face meant only trouble.

"I went to Keith Summervale's funeral," Kelly announced truculently. "From there, on a hunch, I rode out to Rockville with one of the boys from the office, to look at a body found beside a road out that way this morning. Different clothes—but it was the fellow you slipped money to right after Summervale was killed. So what, Maddox—before I put the cops and the Masterton Agency on it?"

"Kelly," Mr. Maddox said, "I haven't killed anyone."

"Tell the cops. We met out that way last night. Remember?"

Mr. Maddox stood motionless for a somber, thoughtful moment. "It wouldn't hurt your column to expose a crooked play at the track," he guessed. "Kelly, will you bet twenty thousand for me on the Dobson horse, to win tomorrow?"

Kelly's reply axed back. It was savage. "A bribe, Maddox?"

"You'll be betting it anywhere except at the track. I'd rather you bet it with Santone, at the Valley Club."

Kelly sneered. "And when the horse loses, you get your money back?"

"Bet it anywhere, then. If the horse loses, I'm out twenty. If he wins, hand the profit to Summervale's widow."

That hit Kelly where his emotions were tender. He stared; he moistened his lips. "Suppose I just turn the twenty over to her?"

"Bet it, or no deal. Then, after the sixth tomorrow, write your story and go to the cops."

"I don't get it," Kelly finally admitted suspiciously.

"I'M buying time," said Mr. Maddox curtly. "Your friend's widow seems to be the only way I can reach a hard-head like you. And you're the one man who can cause trouble now."

Kelly wheeled over and called a number out of the telephone directory. A moment later he was talking to Dalla Dobson.

"A man named Maddox wants to bet twenty thousand on your horse, Mrs. Dobson. Wants me to bet the money. Will you handle it for me through the Valley Club?"

Kelly listened, said, "We'll bring it out." He turned back to Mr. Maddox. "She's sore—but she'll do it if I don't print anything about it in the morning paper, to bring the public betting too. She'll let Santone think it's her money."

"Fair enough," Mr. Maddox assented.

"One more condition," added Kelly, stubbornly. "I'm with you from now until the sixth race is over tomorrow. In on everything, even telephone talk." Kelly's toughness was metallic. "Take it—or take the cops now."

"I'll take it, Kelly."

They went to the Dobson house in Mr. Maddox' car. The cash money had been in the hotel safe, and Kelly took it to the door and talked with Dalla alone. On the way back, Kelly picked up an overnight bag at his apartment. They were silent, grim when they returned to the bright busy hotel lobby.

Cassidy's blocky, challenging figure heaved out of a lobby chair and intercepted them near the elevator bank. "Private business, Joe," Cassidy said ominously.

"Kelly can hear it."

"Our Washington office just told me they've had men all day tracing a guy named Blount, who was a groom for the Dobson Stable. They say Joe Maddox hired the agency to find the guy."

"That's right." For the first time in hours, Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Cassidy, are you working for me now?"

Cassidy looked like the admission might gag him. "They just handed the case to me. The man has been located.

He's at a flea-bag hotel on lower Pennsylvania Avenue, under his own name. What are you up to, Joe?"

"The hired help," chided Mr. Maddox, "doesn't cross-examine. Keep watching the man. Check his visitors. I want to know where he is every minute, tonight and tomorrow. Give me a report in the morning."

"Me working for you!" muttered Cassidy prayerfully.

In the morning, Room Service sent up breakfast for them. Kelly telephoned his secretary, then paced restlessly about the suite. Cassidy telephoned his report. Blount had turned in early, gone out this morning for early breakfast, and was in his hotel lobby now, studying the racing form.

"Keep watching him," Mr. Maddox ordered.

Shortly after that, Mr. Maddox and Oscar began placing long-distance telephone calls. Kelly dragged up a chair and listened with alert suspicion.

Finally, impatiently, Kelly said, "You're trying to find out whether Santone is laying-off the money on the Dobson horse in other cities. What if he is?"

Mr. Maddox, in shirt sleeves, cigar half-smoked, explained briefly. "Santone holds forty-two thousand on the horse, that I know of. If he lays the money off, he expects the horse to win."

"Obviously," said Kelly impatiently. "And if he continues to hold all the money, he thinks the horse will lose."

"Exactly. On form, the horse figures to win. The Dobsons and their trainer expect a win. So if Santone is certain the horse won't win, and holds the money himself, then he must know something. Which," said Mr. Maddox caustically, "is one reason I helped load Ernie with money on the horse. That much cash can be traced if he lays it off. Ernie's out on a limb now. He wins big or loses his shirt—and leaves evidence no matter what he decides to do."

Kelly stood up restlessly. "Sounds to me like you know something definite. Why don't you go to the track stewards? Or the police? Or the Masterton Agency?"

"No proof of anything," said Mr. Maddox shortly. "This whole business is

punching at haunts. I was digging at it when you built a fire under me last night. Now I've got to watch Santone out on his limb—and try to saw him off where proof will show."

Mr. Maddox jammed the cigar in the corner of his mouth, and spoke gruffly past it. "Two men dead already. You're trying to cut me down with the blame. Made me risk twenty thousand of my own money for the chance to get at Ernie Santone. You insisted on hanging around. Now keep quiet. I'm getting tired of a man named Kelly."

Kelly flushed angrily, made no reply.

Room Service sent up lunch. The long distance calls had been completed. The frequently buzzing telephones now brought Oscar's reply again and again. "Sorry. Not booking today."

"Don't pass up business because I'm here," Kelly finally said sulkily.

Mr. Maddox ignored him. Cassidy telephoned just before one o'clock. Mr. Maddox talked to him and said, "Good. I'll see you at the track. Have several extra men there."

At one-thirty Mr. Maddox announced, "Let's go."

THE horses were running when Mr. Maddox wheeled the convertible into the Laurel Track parking area. The race trains from Washington and Baltimore were in. These were the afternoon glamour hours. A great wave of sound rolled out of the stands as the second race came in.

The three of them walked into the clubhouse. Cassidy, waiting for their arrival, joined them. "So you three are

still together," Cassidy commented suspiciously.

"Are you still working for me?" Mr. Maddox countered blandly.

Cassidy's half-smile was unpleasant. "Joe, you're paying me for what I'm doing," Cassidy said. "Which is watching you. Now who's the dope?" Cassidy became business-like. "The guy Blount left his hotel with a man in a black sedan. They drove here to the track. They're in a grandstand box, minding their own business. I've got two men watching them. Three more standing by," said Cassidy, "and me. It's costing you plenty."

"Seen Ernie Santone?"

"Don't know the gent. No orders about him."

"Oscar, go with Cassidy and look at that pair in the box," directed Mr. Maddox. "See if one of them is the man you followed the other morning. We'll make this the meeting spot."

Kelly went with Mr. Maddox through the crowded clubhouse. "Santone should be here. I want to find him and start him sweating," Mr. Maddox remarked.

"The paddock's a good place to look," Kelly suggested.

They found Santone and a girl companion on the fringe of the paddock crowd. Ernie's tall thin figure in lightweight mixed tweed, was close to being handsome.

The girl was a sultry beauty with burnished chestnut hair, slender striking legs, and full lips. Sunglasses gave her slanting eyes a smoky, smoldering look, which estimated Mr. Maddox as he said:



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"Ernie, is this your lucky day?" And then, big and smiling and obviously prosperous, Mr. Maddox spoke to the girl. "We haven't met. I'm Joe Maddox."

"Miss Wentmore," she said, and smiled with the lips only. "I've heard of you."

Mr. Maddox gave Santone more of the bland smile. "How do you figure the sixth?"

"This," said Ernie Santone coldly, "is the third race. I'll figure the sixth when it gets here."

"Bet the Dobson horse. It's in the bag."

"Bet him yourself."

"I did, Ernie. Don't say you weren't warned."

As they walked away, Kelly's tough grin flashed briefly. "That needled him. And no wonder Gregg Dobson went for that Wentmore babe. She's got voltage, and amperage too."

"And still a shill for Santone's racket," said Mr. Maddox with distaste. "Will you watch those two while I get Cassidy to put a tail on them?"

Kelly said, "I wasn't going to let you out of my sight. But risking twenty thousand, and donating any profit to a widow, draws that much of a break."

"A heart like a cream puff," Mr. Maddox praised sarcastically as he shouldered off through the crowd.

Cassidy and Oscar were waiting near the clubhouse entrance. "The one with Blount ain't the man I followed," Oscar reported.

Mr. Maddox told Cassidy to put two of his Masterton men watching Santone and the girl. When Cassidy left, Mr. Maddox told Oscar, "Search for the man who drove Santone's green car the other morning. If he's not here at the track, I've guessed wrong, and it's bad."

"How bad?" Oscar questioned with apprehension.

"I think I know what's going to happen. If it does happen, the Dobson's lose the race and their money. I lose twenty thousand. Santone gets it all. He's in this up to murder now. He'll try anything, including more murder, to put it over. That fellow is my key man. We're the only two who can spot him. I'll help look."

"Murder? In this crowd?" Oscar protested.

"Easier than in down-town Baltimore or Washington. And it can happen if necessary. Santone is in too deep."

"Who gets murdered if it's necessary?"

"You or me, probably."

"So now we make book on murder at the track," Oscar said bitterly. He vanished in the crowd, a small unobtrusive man, who would doggedly do what Joe Maddox requested, even if it was tagged with murder.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Deadly Horse Sense

AS MR. MADDOX searched through the clubhouse and grandstand enclosures, the fourth race was going to the post. This was a milling Saturday crowd, forming long lines at the tote windows, jostling, happy and care-free. Finding one man among all these thousands was suddenly becoming formidable.

Later, at the meeting spot, where Kelly waited also, Cassidy made another report.

"Santone and the dame have spoken to fifty people. Glad-handing friends. Then Santone leaves her and goes over to the grandstand."

"To see Blount? Mr. Maddox asked quickly.

Cassidy shook his head. "Santone climbed up to the top seats of the grandstand. He was standing up there alone, the last report I got." Cassidy's suspicions were at a slow boil. "All this looks like a lot of malarkey. You're hiring the Masterton Agency for a smoke-screen!"

"Keep it smoking," Mr. Maddox ordered. "Let me know immediately if Santone goes down to that grandstand box and talks with Blount. Or Blount joins him."

The fifth race was coming up as Mr. Maddox walked off. Kelly stayed close, and Kelly's look was hardening with suspicion. "Maddox, if you're working an angle with Santone after all—I'll pull every wire my paper can find to nail you."

"Kelly," said Mr. Maddox, "shut up."

I've got my own worries haunting me."

A moment later Pop Harvey tugged at Mr. Maddox' elbow. Pop's steel spectacles were more askew than usual on his sharp nose. "Been huntin' you, Joe! Somethin' you oughta know!" Pop glowered at Kelly, who edged close.

"Kelly can hear it," Mr. Maddox said.

Pop shrugged. "I heard how the Dobson hoss gave a buck-jump on the track yesterday without no reason. Couple hours ago I happened to think of a hoss that done the same thing in a race at Detroit last year. Caused a pile-up. Crippled some hosses, and a jockey got his neck broke. Couple more jockeys went to the hospital."

"I remember that now," Mr. Maddox recalled.

"I asked Brandywine Jenkins about it," said Pop hurriedly. "He was at Detroit last year. Brandywine says the hoss had been actin' queer for some time. An' they had a stable dog that died."

"Does Brandywine know what men worked for that stable?" Mr. Maddox demanded.

"The groom," said Pop, "was a feller name of Blount. Same man who come in from Kentucky with this Dobson hoss."

A great sigh of sound lifted from the crowd as the fifth race broke out of the six-furlong gate at the head of the backstretch, and Mr. Maddox spoke harshly.

"Last year valuable horses, a dog and a jockey were killed. This week two dogs and two men are already dead. Blount has evidently hooked up with Ernie Santone to try the Detroit trick here at Laurel. Blount masterminds the dirty work. Santone heads the whole deal and handles the betting end. And we can't do a thing about it until they're caught throwing the race. Pop, where did the pile-up happen at Detroit?"

"They was coming into the stretch turn, bunched on the rail," said Pop.

The fifth race was rushing to the finish wire as Mr. Maddox plowed through the crowd. Kelly stayed at his heels. Under the grandstand, Mr. Maddox paused to rent a pair of binoculars, and then he climbed the long flights of steps to the top seats of the crowded grandstand.

Standing behind the seats, one could

see the whole great infield and track oval, backed by dark green woods beyond. In the binoculars, the box seats below leaped close. Blount and his dapper companion were still in their chairs, with no sign of leaving, even to bet.

The walkway where Mr. Maddox and Kelly stood was filled with a moving, jostling crowd.

"See if Ernie Santone is still up here," Mr. Maddox ordered Kelly, and this time Kelly did not argue.

Mr. Maddox went the other way, had no luck, and turning back, met Kelly. "Santone's beyond where we were standing," Kelly said. "He's alone. Seemed to be looking at the finish pole through his binoculars."

Mr. Maddox immediately turned his glasses to that point. Men were loitering beyond the finish pole on the other side of the track. "Don't see the man I'm looking for," Mr. Maddox said, lowering the glasses.

"All this should be reported to the stewards," Kelly decided restlessly.

"Report what? Nothing's happened," Mr. Maddox said shortly. "All you've got is haunts. They'd laugh at you."

Kelly said stubbornly, "A hundred thousand dollars worth of horses could be killed in this next race, and jockeys crippled or killed. What are you going to do about it?"

"Watch Ernie Santone," decided Mr. Maddox. "He knows what's going to happen, and where it will happen. There's not time enough to hunt it out ourselves."

A few minutes later they were standing near Santone, with the good-natured jamming crowd brushing past their backs. Santone was intently looking out over the track. The high soaring notes of the bugle came out of the loudspeaker horns as horses left the paddock for the sixth race parade.

**E**RNIE SANTONE lifted his binoculars and focused them toward the backstretch and the woods beyond. Slowly he swept the glasses toward the stretch turn.

Mr. Maddox' own powerful binoculars followed. He lowered them a moment.

then looked again exactly where Ernie was looking. He picked up a solitary figure skirting the outside fence of the stretch turn. Only head and shoulders of the man were visible. But, bareheaded, smoking a cigarette, there was no mistaking the sharp profile.

"There he is!" Mr. Maddox blurted under his breath with sharp relief.

He shoved the binoculars into their leather case. "Let's go!" he said.

Bill Kelly said nothing. Kelly was standing with a chiseled wooden expression. His head was half-turned toward Mr. Maddox. His eyes were rolling back across his left shoulder where a stranger was crowding close.

A hard jab in Mr. Maddox' back explained everything. A second man stood behind Mr. Maddox. His threat was sharp. "Keep quiet, Maddox, or you get it!"

Kelly said, "Maddox, did you arrange this as part of the act?"

"I had everyone watched but myself—and Santone took care of that," Mr. Maddox said.

The gun muzzle prodded against his spine. They were an unnoticed part of the Saturday throng, high up in the grandstand. And once the sixth race had been run, what could be done about it?

The horses were slowly filing past the stands, jockey silks vivid in the late afternoon sunlight. Jubilo was worrying the bit and throwing his head. His black coat was a sheen of nervous sweat. The shuffle of feet and the sound of thousands of people was a steady surf, through which one had to speak loudly. Cassidy's voice lifted loudly behind Mr. Maddox.

"You trying to hide up here, Joe?"

Cassidy got his reply from the man behind Mr. Maddox. "Move on, fellah!" the man told Cassidy. "Quit shoving!"

"I want to talk to that big tub there," Cassidy snapped.

"Maybe he don't wanna talk! Move on!"

Oscar was there too. Oscar's voice begged urgently, "Cassidy! C'mere!"

Cassidy tried again, a seething note in his voice. "Joe Maddox!" It sounded like he was shoving between the two men. His hand slapped forward to Mr. Maddox' shoulder.

Mr. Maddox had been waiting rigidly, wondering who would get hurt first. He felt the gun muzzle rake fast across his back, and he knew.

Big as he was, Mr. Maddox pivoted like a ballet dancer, his right elbow smashing back in a pile-driving blow. In the same instant Cassidy uttered a roaring sound, like a stricken bull. Then Mr. Maddox' elbow slammed into a man's neck, driven by all the weight of his big whirling bulk.

He saw Cassidy then. Cassidy was staggering. He'd been slugged on the cheekbone with something heavy concealed in a strong brown paper sack.

The man who'd slugged Cassidy was reeling back off Mr. Maddox' elbow. A woman screamed as Mr. Maddox lunged at the broad-shouldered, flat-faced stranger.

He grabbed for the paper sack, and felt a gun inside. No bluff there. His other big hand grabbed for the man's neck. He got sack and neck as the crowd clotted at the spot. Prayerfully Mr. Maddox hoped the gun wouldn't go off and kill an innocent person. He yanked the struggling stranger close, and ruthlessly socked him.

The victim screamed. Mr. Maddox let go the neck and drove a big fist against the jaw. The man went sprawling down against massed legs and feet, and Mr. Maddox held the paper sack.

The second stranger was down too. Oscar was snatching up a second paper sack. Oscar's other hand held a medium-sized steel end-wrench.

Kelly looked as if he'd been reprieved from a mortician's slab, and still wasn't sure why or how. Cassidy was swearing in thick dazed fury. A large purple swelling was blossoming under Cassidy's left eye.

Oscar gestured at Mr. Maddox with the wrench. "I got this outta the auto tools after you said there might be trouble," Oscar explained. He could be a dangerous little man when cornered.

Cassidy didn't hear that, or didn't believe it. Thickly Cassidy said, "So you want it this way, Joe?"

Time was running out. Cassidy could wreck the last hope. There wasn't time to explain or convince. Mr. Maddox said



loudly, for the crowd, "You're drunk!"

His chopping right fist found Cassidy's chin, and dropped him. "Hold him while I get help!" Mr. Maddox ordered loudly. With assured authority he shouldered fast through the confusion, and kept going faster. Down crowded steps. Along packed aisles. Down more steps. Out of the grandstand, and on into the stable area where he had room to run.

The race would start in the short chute at the head of the backstretch. The seven fine thoroughbreds had paraded back past the stands. The leaders were cantering far around the clubhouse turn as Mr. Maddox crossed the smoothly harrowed track.

He crossed the inside rail and the steeplechase course beyond it, and headed over the great green infield. For the first time he looked at the gun in the sack. It was a short-barreled .32 automatic. A chill prickled Mr. Maddox' broad back at thought of the narrow margin of escape back there in the grandstand. He began to run again.

When he looked back, other men had crossed the track and were running after him. This infield was no close-clipped lawn. Feet sank heavily into the thick turf. Joe Maddox didn't have the build for a run like this. He kept on, lungs pumping, heart hammering.

In a few minutes, the track ahead might be filled with floundering, crippled horses, dead or injured jockeys. Jubilo, second favorite in the betting at 5 to 2 odds the last time Mr. Maddox had looked, would not win. Ernie Santone would have his profit. Bill Kelly would have his corpse at Rockville, and his charges against Joe

Maddox would be made to the police . . .

**T**HE man who'd been skirting the outside rail of the turn was not in sight. He had to be ahead somewhere. Mr. Maddox looked back again.

The men were gaining, four or five of them. The one in front looked like Kelly. Oscar's small figure was recognizable. Mr. Maddox ran on, gasping for breath. He reached the backstretch of the steeplechase course. The last of the jumps was to his right—and his man was there.

The fellow had been sitting in the shelter of the last jump, invisible unless one came close at this particular spot. He was standing up, looking toward the starting gate. He turned and saw Mr. Maddox. Almost ludicrous surprise flashed on the sharp face.

Mr. Maddox lunged toward him. The wiry figure stood undecided. Far back at the stands a low roar of sound lifted as the horses broke out of the starting gate. Mr. Maddox had fifty yards to go . . . forty . . . thirty . . .

The man cast another hurried look up the track at the onrushing horses. His hand shoved inside his coat. He hesitated, undecided. He might have had the thought Mr. Maddox had. Binoculars were probably trained on them now from the stands, attracted by the running men. Kill a man in full view here, and the rap would be hard to beat. Clever lawyers in court would hardly prevail against binocular testimony from scores of disinterested witnesses.

The horses were coming with a rush, the leaders bunched along the rail. The man whirled and ran to meet them.



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Mr. Maddox' last lunge got close enough to grab the coat collar. His yank brought them colliding together. The man twisted and tried to plunge forward as the first three horses came on fast. His hand snatched out of his coat pocket.

No time to grab at the hand. Mr. Maddox still held the paper sack. He clubbed it to the head. Twice. The man went down like an axed steer. The race thundered past them and on to the stretch turn.

Mr. Maddox stumbled over to the track rail. He was leaning there, gasping for breath, when Kelly reached him. The others were close behind.

"What'd he do?" Kelly gasped.

"Don't touch him."

Cassidy's lumbering run came up behind the other four men. A great swelling now lifted in purple glory under Cassidy's left eye. He was breathless. His bellow was strangled.

"I'll have you locked up, Joe! What'd you do to this man? Who is he?"

"A haunt," said Mr. Maddox.

"Don't talk haunts to me now!" Cassidy yelled.

"He's an assistant haunt," Mr. Maddox corrected. Some of his customary good humor was returning. "The head haunt is Blount, over there in the grandstand. He's working with Ernie Santone, who's feeling sick right now if the Dobson horse took this race."

Cassidy yanked out handcuffs. "Wrong, Joe. *I'm* your haunt! *You're* the one who's gonna be sick!"

A station wagon had driven fast around the stretch turn. It made a skidding stop on the other side of the track rail. Men piled out.

"Who got the race?" Mr. Maddox called.

"Number 4. Jubilo."

Kelly yelled then. Kelly threw his hat on the ground, and stepped over and smote Mr. Maddox on the shoulder.

"I'll say it for her!" Kelly cried. "Bless you again, Maddox! She won't ever have to worry about money after this! And," said Kelly, his awry nose and tough mouth looking even tougher, "I'll see that every newspaper man in the East hears about it! Heaven help the dumb cop who makes it hard for Joe Maddox!" Kelly glared at Cassidy.

Cassidy glared back with his good eye. "I'm listening," Cassidy said, truculently. "It better be good."

The man on the ground was stirring weakly. Mr. Maddox picked up a small object in the grass by the man's hand. He yanked the man up and shoved him into Cassidy's grasp.

"Blount," said Mr. Maddox, "worked in a circus, and evidently picked up ideas about training animals. At night, alone, he could train a horse, with pain probably, until it would bolt every time it got Blount's signal. Make a horse do that in a race, and you've won any money bet with you on the horse. Blount worked it in Detroit last year. It killed three horses and a jockey."

"This," reminded Cassidy, "ain't Detroit."

"It could have been," said Mr. Maddox. "Blount laid low, evidently, until he got a chance to train the Dobson Jubilo the same way. That's why the horse acted so queerly on the Kentucky farm. Cassidy, this man was sent to watch the unloading and make certain the horse was trained right. He was. He kicked on signal. And killed a man."

They were all listening to Mr. Maddox intently.

"There was one little slip," Mr. Maddox said. "A man whom Blount had known in the circus, bummed a ride here in the horse car. He slipped out the other door before the trainer stepped in. We'll never know whether he knew what was going to happen. But he evidently saw Blount inside the car door giving the signal that set the horse off. He knew then."

WHEN I tried to question him a few minutes later, he wouldn't talk. But he evidently blackmailed Blount for a little money. When he got that, he knew he was wise to something worth more money. He must have threatened to go to the Dobsons with what he knew. Blount evidently warned Santone, and Santone's men got the fellow. His body is out at Rockville. After that, Blount quit his job with the Dobsons. He'd already poisoned the dog I had Oscar get; and that was good proof he'd poisoned Jubilo's stable dog in Kentucky. He did

the same thing to a dog at Detroit last year."

"Look," said Cassidy acidly, "you go on about horses. Then dead men. Now you're off on dogs."

"The dogs solved it," said Mr. Maddox. "But, back a little first: that fellow you're holding looked pleased after the cameraman was killed. Then he drove away in Santone's car. I knew then smelly business was cooking. Yesterday morning, when the horse pulled up suddenly in his workout, Blount wasn't around. But this fellow was at the clubhouse rail. It had to be him did the signaling yesterday."

"What signaling?" Cassidy demanded, exasperated.

"Ernie Santone was holding forty-two thousand that I know of on the Dobson horse, in this race," Mr. Maddox said. "Blount, of course, had to work with someone who booked big bets. Santone didn't lay any of that money off, that I could discover. So he clearly expected the horse to lose. It had to be this fellow who was going to make him lose. I've been looking for him since I reached the track today."

"I spotted him through the binoculars from the grandstand. But Santone knew I was trying to make trouble. He had men watching me. They were holding Kelly and me there until after the race. But you came along, Cassidy. You know what happened after that. I barely stopped this man from breaking up the race. You

THE END

can hold him on suspected homicide. And Santone and everyone around him too. Here's what this fellow was trying to signal with."

Cassidy took the small whistle with plastic mouthpiece and two tiny brass tone tubes.

"This thing?" said Cassidy suspiciously. He put it to his mouth and blew. Nothing happened. He blew harder. Nothing happened. "You're crazy! He couldn't signal with this!"

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Try it on the Dobson horse. But stand back when you do. You won't hear anything—but the horse will. The sound is pitched too high for a human ear. But an animal can hear it."

Cassidy muttered, "I've heard of them. Silent dog whistles."

"That's what the vet told me when I asked him what signal a dog or horse would notice, but a man wouldn't. A dog whistle. And that's why Blount got rid of any dog who stayed near the horse he was training. The dog could hear his signals, and look toward him and call attention to him."

Mr. Maddox coldly, "Take this one with you, Cassidy—and tonight I'll buy you the biggest steak in Washington."

"I can eat it after this!" Cassidy growled.

"For your eye," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "You're blind enough with two good eyes. With only one, you'll be absolutely pitiful."

## DOG BITES TAIL

In Hodecourt, France, Fire Chief Hildephonse Houdlin set his village on fire—in order to try out the department's new fire-fighting equipment. He confessed when the owner of the building accused him of getting his hook and ladder too soon to the scene!



In Ontario, Canada, a couple of prowler car boys commandeered a used car from a second-hand dealer's lot, when their departmental car broke down—and spent the rest of the night chasing themselves! The second-hand dealer had reported the car stolen—and not until dawn did the exhausted cops realize whom they'd been hunting.



—E. Jakobsson

# BETTER LATE THAN CADAVER



*Into the marijuana den  
charged copper-hating Penny—  
with her own secret weapon.*

Paul chattered: "Get it  
over with—I can't stand  
her whining!"

**By ELLIS G.  
CURTIS**

**T**RAGEDY had struck Dittmar Street once more, and old Mrs. Dillon was dead, a shapeless bundle of old clothes at the foot of the outside stairway. Down there callous-eyed men talked in everyday tones, as though nothing had happened. To Penny Polacheck this was

a bitter reminder of another tragic hour, when her brother lay dead on this same street—shot by a trigger-happy cop.

She stood over by the window, conscious of the fog dripping from the eaves. Miss Langdon, elderly and nervous, rocked and rocked in Mrs. Dillon's creaky old chair. The graying police sergeant sat, uncomfortable, on a straight-backed chair. Penny watched him, her shoulders stiff with dislike, her black eyes hating the blue uniform.

"I discovered the accident," Miss Langdon fluttered. "I went out the back way—I took coffee to her at 7:30 every morning—and there, she was, her gray hair wet with the fog, like she'd been there most of the night!"

"As I understand it," Sergeant Morley said in his flat official voice, "you and Miss Polacheck are the only other tenants. Apparently you were the only persons on the premises at the time of the— the accident."

"Accident!" Penny scoffed.

The sergeant gave her his carefully casual glance which seemed to expect nothing—and demand everything. Most people, admiring her clear white skin and full rebellious mouth, missed entirely the fine firm line of chin and jaw. She didn't think the sergeant missed a thing.

"You sound positive, Miss Polacheck. Are you suggesting the old lady did away with herself?"

"I certainly am not!" Her glance went around the room. "Look—the chest drawers pulled out a little, the pictures askew on the wall. Like maybe someone had searched the room. She'd never leave things that way, Sergeant. The old lady was always very particular about her things being neat."

"That's right," Miss Langdon said, nodding her head.

The sergeant said, "It's possible a prowler was in here. In that case we could assume Mrs. Dillon ran for help, and in her excitement slipped on the stairs. It was a wet night, and that sort of accident—"

"It wasn't an accident," Penny insisted stubbornly.

"Oh, come now, Miss Polacheck. Surely you're not suggesting we start off on a witch hunt. An old lady like that,

with nothing to steal, just knocked off without reason—"

"Cops've been known to make very stupid mistakes, Sergeant!"

"Now, Penny," Miss Langdon chided. "Mrs. Dillon lived on a small pension and was forever making a poor mouth. But I'm sure nobody hated her."

The sergeant's tired impersonal scrutiny clashed with Penny's unyielding stare. He said, "If there's something you know which'll throw new light on this, let's have it."

Penny's fingers twisted in the window cord. She knew something all right—but why should she tell a policeman! It'd be forgotten, just the way her brother was forgotten.

"Last night," Miss Langdon offered eagerly, "I went over on the avenue to buy a paper from Dummy John. I was on my way home when I saw the old lady. She was talking to a boy."

"Someone you know?" the sergeant asked, his voice quiet.

"Well, I'm not sure. He was about sixteen, I'd say, and he wore one of those red advertising caps. But all boys look alike to me."

"You say they were talking. Did you hear what they said?"

"No, I didn't pay much attention. I know I spoke to her and she didn't hear me. Anyway, she didn't answer."

"If you could remember one word, a name maybe."

Nervously Miss Langdon pleaded her blue apron. Penny dropped the window cord, her breath caught.

"Let me think, Sergeant. She called him Paul, I think, and she was warning him about—about a girl. Oh, I do remember now. She said to stop fooling around with—with—what was her name? . . . Mary—that was it. Mary Warner!"

PENNY breathed again. Surely it must be plain now, even to the police officer, that this wasn't an accident. But, before he could answer, a policeman came up the back stairs.

"We're all through," he reported, and at the sergeant's nod went back down again.

The sergeant got to his feet. "I guess that's all for now, folks."

Penny started a fresh protest, and changed her mind. Instead, on sudden impulse, she followed the sergeant down the stairs; stood silently beside him while the areaway was cleared, trying not to see the stretcher-bearers with their light burden. The fog was shredding away before the morning breeze, and she felt the pale sun on her black hair.

"I—I want to talk to you, Sergeant."

"It's just come to me who you are," he said. "Your picture was in all the papers."

She nodded. "The sob sisters loved me. The orphan girl who'd tried to be father and mother to her wild young brother."

"Not so long ago, was it?"

"One month, two weeks and five days, Sergeant!"

His big square hand massaged his chin. "There's our side of it, Miss Polacheck. The kid was loaded with marijuana. It's tricky stuff, you know. Exaggerates everything out of all proportion. So he starts a one-man-crime wave—"

"With a toy pistol," Penny cried bitterly. "And a big brave cop shot him down!"

She put her hands to her face, trying to stop their trembling. The law was her protection—she'd been told this over and over. Maybe if she cooperated they'd get some place, they'd find the real killer of her brother. It was worth a try, she thought, letting her hands fall away from her face.

"Maybe the cop was just over-anxious," she said. "But my brother wasn't as wild as he was painted. We both wanted to get away from Dittmar Street, and he was going to get a job so we could. He admitted that some of the boys had been trying what he called a thrill smoke, but he promised never to touch it again. It isn't a drug; it isn't habit forming."

"That's right. But he did smoke it again."

Color flared in her cheeks, but she fought down her anger. If it killed her, she was going to give this cooperation thing a try.

"I know all that, Sergeant. I believe he was given a much heavier amount

that way. I think there was a reason for this which hasn't been discovered yet. Maybe I have a clue, something you can follow up."

The big man said, encouragingly, "I'm willing to listen."

Penny took a long breath. "Well, last night Mrs. Dillon dropped in, as was her habit. She's old; she rambled on at length. She said something about liking me, and then she began to talk about Bruce. How he ran her errands and never teased her, as the other boys did. She said he was really a good kid, only he never had a chance."

She had to wait a moment to steady her voice. The sergeant lit a cigarette, giving her time. He offered her one, but she shook her head.

"Next she said something should be done about Bruce's death, and she'd been snooping—that was her exact word, snooping—and she'd come up with a lead. I asked what she meant, and she said it might not prove to be anything, and she'd tell me when she learned more about it."

Penny's hands twisted together. "I let her go. If I'd made her tell me more, or if I'd gone with her—"

"It wouldn't have made any difference, probably." He flicked the cigarette away. "So far we have only surmise, Miss Polacheck, and it isn't enough."

He started around the building, Penny at his side. "It all ties in with what Miss Langdon heard," she insisted, her voice tense with her need to convince him. "You know better than anyone what Mrs. Dillon meant when she warned Paul against Mary Warner. That's slang for marijuana!"

They came around the building, and the raucous noise of the street slapped at Penny. Cheap, smelly Dittmar Street that whispered: *Tragedy follows Penny Polacheck, it won't leave her alone.*

"Please, Sergeant, just think about it. Promise you'll think about it, and not write it off as an accident."

Again his big hand massaged his chin as he looked down at her, his eyes guarded. She felt the morbid lingering crowd watching them. She heard the monotonous bark of a dog, and horns demanding a way through the choked

street. She smelled rotting orange peel and smoke from a trash pile.

"Thanks for your cooperation, Miss Polacheck. We'll file this information, and if anything new comes up—"

Old angers began to build in Penny, even as the noises of the street built, layer on layer. Everything she'd said just bounced off his stolid indifference.

"I know," she cried in bitter accusation. "You're going to sit on it, the way you did when Bruce was killed. You said then that the peddlers had gone into hiding, you'd have to wait until they started operating again. Well, they've started, Sergeant Morley, whether you believe it or not, and a murderer's been dropped right—in—your—lap!"

Eyes suddenly hard as blue steel, he said, "It's still police business, Miss Polacheck, and we'll take care of it in our own way, even if you think we're stupid." With that he turned and walked away from her.

"I hate cops," she stormed at him. "Oh, how I hate cops!"

**B**UT the broad blue back ignored her outburst, and she ran inside, blinded by stinging tears of futility. Empty and sick with her grief, she pressed her shaking body against the door, and faced the little room.

She'd tried to brighten it with knicknacks from the dime store, where she clerked. She'd only emphasized its bleak hopelessness. The only real thing, to her, was the enlarged snapshot of Bruce pinned on the wall. Bruce at twelve, with stubby lashes and a wide grin.

The tears dried in sudden determina-

tion as she pulled her small body erect. She was a product of Dittmar Street wasn't she? She'd learned to snatch apples with the other kids and to jeer at cops. To put her fingers to her mouth and blow a warning whistle as shrill as any boy on the street.

"I'm not licked," she assured the smiling boy on the wall. "I'll find a way, Bruce darling, I promise! . . ."

All that day, as she sold notions and rang up sales, one part of her mind held to her problem. Yet, when it was time to go home, she still had no definite plan. Getting off the car at the avenue, she crossed over to the newsstand.

"Hello, Dummy John," she said to the wizened little man as he handed her the evening paper. She gave the front page a swift glance, then leafed through to the last page.

"Not a thing about Mrs. Dillon's death," she said. "Did all the papers pass it up?"

The dummy nodded. He'd been hurt in an accident long ago, and couldn't speak. But his hearing was perfect.

"You must know about everyone on the street," Penny said. "Do you know a boy named Paul? He's about sixteen, about the age of Bruce when he— Do you know who I mean?"

Dummy John thought a moment, and then nodded his head.

"Good," Penny cried. "Where does he live?"

He shook his head, with a shrug of his shoulders. He knew the boy, but he didn't know where he lived.

"If you find out," she said, "let me know," and gave him her address. She

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hesitated a moment, half-inclined to tell him why she wanted this Paul. But she changed her mind.

By the time she'd eaten and washed her few dishes, she'd decided to go upstairs and look over Mrs. Dillon's apartment—without the sergeant's too-watchful eyes. She had to make a start, and it might as well be there; the place was never locked.

She slipped out the back way and up the stairs. Fog had rolled in again with the darkness. She opened the door and stepped inside; snapped on the light. Without the old lady's small figure bustling about, the room seemed alien and empty.

Penny moved into the center of the room, trying to imagine where, if she were Mrs. Dillon, she'd hide an article of value. But her mind shied away from its problem, and she had a sense of tension and unease. She felt causeless air-currents against her face.

She tried to tell herself she was imagining things because the old lady had died here. Only, it couldn't be that entirely. Every room had its own smell, but the odors of this room had changed since morning, when strangers trampled about. The faint spicy scent of stick cinnamon and cloves had been replaced by tobacco smoke. Fresh smoke.

And then suddenly she knew: *she was not alone in this room.*

She started slowly to back toward the door. A cool voice ordered, "Not so fast, youngster."

She stood there, frozen. Only her eyes moved. They found the owner of the voice, standing in the kitchen door. A young man, hard-eyed and still.

"A new style in burglars?" he asked softly.

He was about thirty, she judged, with big shoulders. Big enough to buck a football line—or pitch an old lady down a stairway.

She drew air into tight lungs. *Play it smart, she cautioned herself. Don't let him see you're scared silly.*

"Is breaking and entry your regular work?" she asked.

He said, "Maybe I rented the place."

"Even with the housing shortage," she said with a light shrug, "that would be

rushing things. And why would you be sitting here in the dark? Anyway," she hastened to add, "I live downstairs. I wanted to see that things were in order."

He came closer and looked at her. "Keep out of this, chick. That's a cute little nose. Too bad to spoil it."

"I can go to the police," she said archly, "and tell them there's a man up here."

He smiled, but he wasn't amused. "I'd be gone, and they'd say you were hysterical. Or I'd produce a rent receipt—and you'd feel even sillier." He added, "You look like a bright girl. So smarten up—keep out of it."

Every instinct wanted to defy him. But she must act sort of cool and easy, if she wanted to get out of here. She said, with a teasing little laugh, "Oh, you won't have to throw me out, I'm going. Good-by for now."

SHAKING a little, she got out of the room and down the stairs. She went to Miss Langdon's apartment and was admitted.

"It's a bad day," Miss Langdon said, going back to the rocker. "Gossip, gossip all day long."

Penny moved restlessly about the room as she asked, of herself as well as the older woman, "What does she have hidden up there—and who is the man?"

"The—the man, Penny?"

"Yes, the man." She told Mrs. Langdon of the encounter, adding, "What is he after—and why is it valuable?"

"It could be money. You know all that talk a while back about her being miserly. It's started again."

"It's just talk. You know how she was always borrowing."

"But not enough to be killed for."

"You mean—she was murdered, Penny?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm all mixed up."

"Penny," she said, smoothing her apron over a bony knee, "they say one of the boys saw her counting a roll of bills."

"It may just be something important to whoever wants it."

"It was Bruce who saw her counting the money."

The silence held for a long moment. Then, in a ragged voice, Penny whis-

pered, "And now both of them are dead."

"I'm scared," Miss Langdon said, rocking back and forth. "You've got to tell the police, Penny."

"No."

"We'll both be killed in our beds."

Penny tilted her head, listening. "He's still up there, moving around. He'll leave, and I'm going to follow him. Lend me some of your clothes, Miss Langdon. He knows me now. I've got to look different."

"Penny, you don't know what you're saying!"

"I know what I'm going to do. If you won't help me—"

In the end Penny won her over. When she was dressed in a borrowed dress and a veiled hat, Miss Langdon stood back and looked her over, a small figure in rusty black.

"Well, I declare, Penny, dressed in my clothes you look like an old woman. In a way, you look like Mrs. Dillon."

"All the better," Penny replied. "He'll think I'm a ghost. Now turn out the lights and we'll watch for him."

They didn't have too long to wait. Quick steps came down the stairs and around the house. Penny let herself out noiselessly. The fog had thickened, and this would help conceal her identity.

But the fog betrayed her in the end. She followed the young man along Dittmar and over onto the avenue, now almost empty of foot traffic. Then he was gone, suddenly, as though he'd melted into the fog.

She went on another block; hesitated before a dimly lit shop window. Fog, caught in the awning, dripped faintly; and somewhere inside a store a clock struck ten times.

Her gaze left the contents of the window, and she saw, reflected against the glass, her own figure. Back of that was the slight shadowy form of a man peering across her shoulder.

Some instinct, born of the moment, warned her not to run. She turned slowly, the look of shock stiff on her face—and almost laughed in hysterical relief.

"You frightened me, Dummy John!"

He had the last of his papers under one arm, and with his free hand he pointed to her dress, shaking his head.

"Oh, this outfit. It does make me look like Mrs. Dillon." She felt the necessity to talk to someone older and wiser. He'd always seemed friendly, especially when Bruce—

"I've been following a man," she said. "A prowler I found in the old lady's apartment. Maybe I should've called the cops, but I just don't trust them." Encouraged by his emphatic nod of approval—none of the people in this district trusted cops—she went on, "So I disguised myself and followed him. But I lost him in the fog."

Frowning, she thought back to that encounter. "Dummy, there's something valuable in the old lady's apartment. That's why she was killed. Don't shake your head at me, I'm sure it was not an accident. If I could just locate Paul."

He took a pencil out of his pocket and scribbled on the margin of a newspaper. She looked at it.

"I'll give you five dollars," she agreed. "I'm going home now. If you get a line on him, let me know, and quick."

She felt let down and defeated and very young. Maybe the sergeant was right, and she had started on a useless witch hunt. Walking slowly, trying to think the thing through to some conclusion, she finally realized that someone was following her. She paused before a window display, and managed a glance back along the way she'd come.

HER eyes met the mocking gaze of the young man she'd surprised in Mrs. Dillon's room!

He came up to her. "You lost me when I stepped into a doorway back there in the middle of the block."

"Who's following who?" she demanded.

"Are you always mad about something? You'd be quite pretty if you'd smile occasionally. And your taste in clothes!"

"Camouflage," she retorted.

Uncertainly she studied his face in the light from the store window: the firm chin, the blue eyes which could be so hard, and the resolute mouth, twisted now in a half grin.

"Why did you stop me?" she asked then.

"You really shouldn't be out on the street at this hour," he said, his face sobering. "Not even in the 'camouflage,'"

"Now you sound like a cop, telling me what to do."

Something about his face, as he centered his gaze on a pack of cigarettes, caught her attention. When he offered her one, she shook her head.

"Why—why, you're a cop!" she cried accusingly.

"Detective-Lieutenant," he admitted.

"Glenn Collins to my friends."

"A cop's a cop," she said flatly, turning away.

"So you don't like policemen, Miss Polacheck."

She swung around, her stubborn little chin at an angry tilt. "If you know my name, you know all about me. So you know I hate them all—and why!"

"We do the best we can, most of us," he said, and snapped on a lighter.

Again she studied his face as he bent to the small flame. If she'd met him under different circumstances, if there wasn't her loyalty to Bruce—this need to hate all policemen. . . .

His voice cut across her thoughts. "After all, it's police business. So why don't you go home and forget it."

"Forget it." She choked. "That's the policeman's slogan. Well, I won't forget—not until I've squared things for my brother."

His voice called after her, suddenly sharp with urgency. "Go home, you crazy kid—you're not safe at this hour!"

"If I need you, copper, I'll whistle. Like this!"

She put her fingers to her mouth and whistled, a shrill and defiant sound. Then she was walking fast. Her face was wet. She wiped at it with the back of her hand. Damn the fog.

A traffic signal held her for a moment. She tapped an impatient foot against the sidewalk; heard the hurrying steps back of her. The green light came up, but she waited, expecting to hear her name called in Glenn Collin's voice.

Instead, a hand caught her arm and pulled her around. It was Dummy John, coat collar turned up against night chill.

"Oh, it's you. You sold your papers?"

He made a gesture—a motion for her to follow him.

"You—you've found Paul!" she guessed.

He nodded, a rapid bobbing of his head. Then he rubbed a thumb and forefinger together.

"Oh, you want your money now. Well—okay."

He put the bill carefully away in a ragged wallet. Then he started off down the street, walking rapidly in spite of the drag of one foot. They turned down a side street, into a pocket of fog so thick it was like walking into a high wall that gave constantly before them. Their passing roiled the fog into silent eddies which closed in behind them and were still again.

Dummy John took her to a garage on the rear of a lot. She saw traces of a house which had burned long ago, and dark clumps of bushes. He swung open a door and a thin shaft of light picked them out of darkness. Then they were inside.

Blinking against the sudden change from darkness into light, Penny gave a quick glance around. The mean little room held a rusty stove, a table cluttered with greasy dishes and a cot untidily spread with soiled blankets. There was some other thing in the room she wanted to make a note of, but at that moment she saw the boy, standing against the wall.

He was thin and tall, and his light eyes held a look of surprise.

"You're Paul," she said. "You can help—I'm sure you can. You knew Mrs. Dillon, you were talking to her last night."

His hard young face, under the red-visored cap, lost some of its color. "You—you're the Polacheck girl." His gaze shifted. "What's the deal, Dummy. Why did you bring her here?"

"I paid him to," Penny explained, with a reassuring smile. "You remember how my brother died, and I'm sure you know that Mrs. Dillon is dead too. Well, last night she told me she had a clue which might lead to the marijuana peddlers, and later she was seen talking to you. What did she tell you, Paul?"

The boy's tongue licked across his

lips. "I don't want no part of this," he said.

"Don't be afraid," Penny soothed. "All I want is the name of the person responsible for my brother's death."

Again Paul looked past her, his eyes wide now, and frightened. She turned to Dummy John.

"Tell him it's all right. I won't squeal on him."

**D**UMMY JOHN didn't nod or shake his head. He just stared at her, his wind-tanned face yellow in the light from the kerosene lamp; and the way he just stood there almost frightened her.

"If it's more money you want—" She faltered.

His Adam's apple jerked in his scarred throat, and he brought out a guttural grunt. Then he moved, a sliding motion that took him to the door. He turned the key in the lock and put it in his pocket.

Her mind darted frantically, trying to guess. Then, with all the shattering force of a nightmare, she knew what it was she'd wanted to think about when she first came in. It was the sickish sweet odor lingering in the room. *Marijuana smoke.*

Instantly everything meshed into pattern. Outside she heard the faint far sound of a siren fretting against the night—and in here, their quickened breathing and the shuffling sound of the dummy's shoes against the bare boards. And even that sound was stilled.

"You peddled marijuana to the boys!" she accused, her voice loud against the tension. "You killed the old lady because

she found out about you. You—and Paul!"

"Hell—you didn't say nothin' about murder!" Paul's voice rose high and shrill. "You said the old dame caught you robbing her and slipped on the stairs. You said it was purely an accident!"

Penny had never been really afraid before in all her life. She was afraid now. She'd told the little newsvender too much back there on the avenue, and now she had to die. She wanted to think about the young policeman, but she hadn't time.

Dummy John moved a step toward her, his hands hanging loose at his sides. He took another step, and another. Fear leaped at her, like a cat. It clawed at her reason. She tried to dart past him, but he struck at her, a glancing blow which sent her back against the table. The lamp tilted, was steady again.

Paul caught the dummy's arm. "I don't want t' get mixed up in no more killin's. Let's get th' hell out o' here!"

The dummy slapped him hard—once, and then again. The lad put up his arms, trying to shield his face.

"Okay, okay," he mumbled. "But get it over with."

Penny's head spun dizzily, like a runaway merry-go-round. But she still had fight in her. She caught up the lamp and flung it against the floor. Flame caught at the oil, but the man was quick. He smothered the flame in a blanket, and now they were in darkness.

"They'll get you, Dummy." Her voice sounded tired, almost disinterested. "That prowler in Mrs. Dillon's place is

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a detective. I talked to him after I left you."

She had him stopped—for as long as she could feed him new information. "He knows Mrs. Dillon was murdered, and he knows about Paul talking to her. So they'll never stop until they find Paul—and then they'll connect him with you."

She repeated conversations, convincing him. She knew he was convinced by the way his breath quickened.

"Get out while you can, Dummy John. Get away before they find you."

He didn't buy it. He had the lust to kill, and words wouldn't stop him. He began that shuffling walk again, and she moved away from him. She came up against the wall. There was no escape.

Paul chattered, "Get it over with. I can't stand her whining!"

His hand reached for her. She could see it. A round blob of light had touched the window, bright against the dirty shade. It hesitated and moved on. Came back.

"Hell—the cops. They're after us, Dummy!"

The light moved on again. Now there was the darkness, and this thing groping for her. She reached deep inside, and in that split-second of time found something that tough, heartless Dittmar had taught her. She put her fingers to her mouth—and sent shrilling out into the night the street kid's shrill whistle of warning.

Dummy John struck her. Knees fluid, she slid down along the wall to the floor. She heard voices and the sound of splintering wood. Then the black void claimed her.

\* \* \*

Penny rode home in the police car, with Sergeant Morley and Glenn Collins. She felt dizzy—and wonderful.

"You almost got yourself killed and me demoted," the young lieutenant said. "Do you realize, Penny Polacheck, what you cost the taxpayers tonight?"

It didn't make sense. She was taking a bawling out from a cop and liking it. She said: "So you knew all the time that Mrs. Dillon was murdered."

"We suspected it," the sergeant admitted. "That's why we put Collins in the old lady's apartment to keep an eye on things. You barged in, and Collins went to phone in a report."

"It's a good thing," Collins said, "that I saw you talking to Dummy John. When I checked later and found you were not home, we figured a connection. We threw every available car into this district, hoping for a break."

Sergeant Morley sighed deeply. "I know you're more interested in what happened to your brother. We got a pretty complete story from Paul. The dummy heard the talk about the old lady's money. Incidentally, it was only a thick roll of ones, about fifty dollars. Well, the dummy loaded Bruce with marijuana and ordered him to rob Mrs. Dillon. Under the unpredictable weed, he tried to rob the whole street—and got killed."

Collins touched her hand in quick sympathy. The sergeant continued: "The dummy couldn't forget the money. He finally went after it, and the old lady caught him. He hit her over the head and pitched her dead body down the stairs."

The big car drew up before Penny's house. Glenn Collins helped her out and walked with her to the door.

He said, "Penny—I'm glad you learned to whistle."

She hesitated only a moment. Then she said, "I'm glad I don't hate cops any more."

## LANGUAGE TROUBLE

★

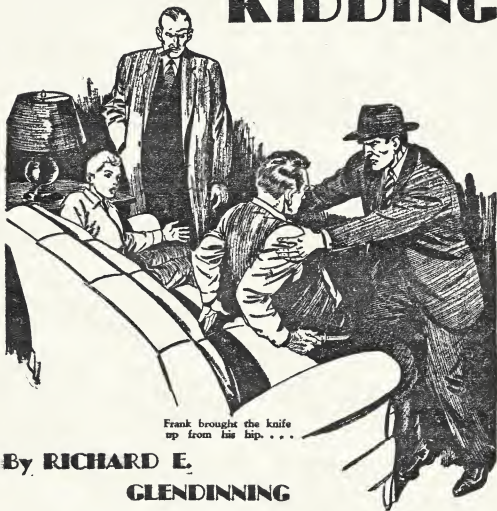
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Until a few years ago, under a 400-year-old statute, it was a crime for Welshmen to speak their own language.

Because of the words it contained, Webster's dictionary was once banned by the courts from the state of Arkansas.

# THE KIDS WEREN'T KIDDING



Frank brought the knife  
up from his hip. . . .

By **RICHARD E.  
GLENDINNING**

**H**E WAS twelve years old and was on his way home from the movies—a picture about the circus—so now he was a death-defying acrobat who walked across space on the high wire a hundred feet above the gasping crowd.

He swayed perilously along the curb, his brown eyes intent upon his feet, un-

*To the bolita cutthroats—the  
youngsters were a mile-sized match . . .  
with a man-sized code.*

mindful of the adults who watched him in amusement from the cheap shops and bars beyond the abyss of sidewalk. The boy came at last to a barrier. A big black car was parked at the curb, its front door open to form a wall in the youngster's path.

There was nothing for him to do but wait.

Two men hustled out of a cigar store and crossed the sidewalk to the big car. One of the men, a tall fellow with an unlighted cigar clenched between his teeth, was carrying a small box about a foot square and two inches thick. The other man, dressed in two tones of gray, looked like a Spaniard.

The man with the box saw the boy. "What's the matter with you, kid?"

"Nothing," the boy said solemnly.

"Then what are you waiting for?" said the man in gray.

"You're on my tight rope."

The man laughed and got in the car. The door slammed shut and the car pulled away from the curb. It was threading through traffic a hundred feet down the street when the boy saw the ball in the gutter. It was a wooden ball, smaller than a golf ball, and it was highly polished.

It was the kind of ball which would attract a boy of twelve.

Forgetting the circus momentarily, he picked up the ball and was surprised to find that it was cold, almost as if it had been in an ice box. He turned the smooth pellet over in his hands and saw the number sixteen neatly painted on it in black. Looking up quickly, he saw the big car vanish around a corner and, thinking that grown men would have no use for such a ball and therefore could not have dropped it, the boy put the hard walnut ball in his pocket.

He hopped up on the curb, an acrobat once more, and moved cautiously along his fragile strand, impending doom lying at either hand. . . .

The man behind the desk was angry, very angry. He was a short man with a close-cropped, bullet-shaped head and cold, deep-set eyes. His hands were pale and seemingly soft but his wrists were thick and strong.

He glared ferociously at the two men in front of him, then directed his attention at the tall man with the dead cigar.

"You lost it," he sneered. "Lost it. Is that all you can say?"

"I'm trying to think, Louie," the tall man whined. "If I knew where it was, don't you think I'd—"

"A ball. A ball about this big—" Louie made a circle with his thumb and forefinger—"and two grown men lost it." He opened the lid of the compact chest on his desk. Inside, the chest was divided off to form a rack with a hundred compartments, each compartment to hold a small, smooth, numbered ball.

There were ninety-nine balls in the chest now. One was missing, number sixteen, and there was a gap between fifteen and seventeen to mark where the missing ball should have been.

Louie tapped the empty space. "Find it."

"We looked everywhere, Louie," the tall man said, chewing his cigar nervously.

"Why didn't you leave it in the box where it belonged instead of carrying it in your pocket?"

"I thought I—"

"*You* thought?" Louie laughed scornfully. "If you'd left it in the box, it never would have been lost. If anybody finds that ball, we might just as well— Where did you look?"

"The car, first off, but it hadn't rolled under the seat," the tall man said. "Then we went back to the cigar store and—"

"And probably told them just what you were looking for and why."

"I may have pulled a boner, Louie," the tall man said, offended, "but I'm not that dumb."

"All right, all right, so it wasn't in the cigar store. Where did you look then?"

"We came out of the store and looked around on the sidewalk and then we looked into the gutter. Still no luck, so—"

The Spaniard in gray chuckled softly and Louie shot him a hard look. Hastily the Spaniard said, "Sorry, Louie. I couldn't help thinking of that kid."

"What kid?"

"The kid at the curb," the Spaniard said. "He tells us we're on his tight rope."

**L**OUIE'S mouth tightened grimly. "Was the kid standing there when you left?"

"Sure," the man in gray said. "He was waiting for us to—"



"You stupid jerks!" Louie roared, pounding the desk with his fists. "You didn't lose the ball in the cigar store and it wasn't in the car, so you lost it in-between." He scowled at them. "Now you tell me who found it."

"The kid?" the tall man asked brightly.

"Of course. What did he look like?"

"Light-haired, a snubbed nose, lots of freckles," the tall man said. "He weighed maybe a hundred pounds and was about twelve or thirteen. He had on a pair of these dungarees and a yellow polo shirt. It had something written on it, I don't remember what."

"Flying Cubs," the Spaniard said. "And don't forget the cowboy belt. One of those wide leather things, studded with pieces of glass."

"All right," Louie said. "He's probably a kid from the neighborhood. Find him. I want that ball and I don't care how you get it."

"You want us to get rough?"

"If you have to. Look—I don't have to paint you a picture. Suppose somebody sees the kid with the ball and asks where he found it. The kid tells. All right, the law comes into it and clamps down on the cigar store."

"So what?" the Spaniard said. "That's not the only place in town where we throw bolita."

"Aren't you smart?" Louie sneered. "Listen, if that kid remembers you two well enough to give the cops a description, you'll never see another bolita ball in your lives. Then it gets to me. That part I don't like."

"You can fix the law, Louie," the tall man said. "You've done it before."

"Don't count on that. There's an election coming up. Anyway, you're forgetting the big thing. What if word gets out that it was lost, then found? Some of the boys are going to wonder why it—today's winning number—was out of the box in the first place."

The tall man and the Spaniard paled. "Lord, Louie," the tall man gasped, frightened, "I didn't think of—"

"Think about it. Think about it while you're looking for the kid." Louie smiled coldly. "And keep in mind that he can describe you."

The men nodded grimly.

"We'll find him," the Spaniard said.

They left the office at the rear of the big garage.

When they were gone, Louie spun his chair and looked out the window at the Florida sunshine. He liked the sunshine and the gentle rustle of palm fronds in the breeze. He liked them too much to have some snot-nosed kid take them away from him.

He turned from the window and ran his hand caressingly over the smooth bolita chest. Bolita, the Spanish-Cuban gambling game, was a big thing in South Florida. The pennies and nickels and dimes and quarters added up to a lot of dollars and kept Louie in expensive clothes and flashy cars. No kid was going to take those things away from him, either.

But a kid, a Flying Cub in a yellow polo shirt, was threatening him. Louie didn't like that. He clenched his fists and the knuckles cracked.

The law in an election year was bad enough, Louie thought, but the other thing was worse. Number sixteen hadn't won

## Message from Garcia

Texas Artist Tells Why It's  
Smart to Switch to Calvert

SAN ANTONIO, Texas—Tony R. Garcia, San Antonio artist and illustrator, knows that it's taste that counts in a whiskey. "Tell everybody," he says, "that I switched to Calvert because of its mild, and smooth taste."



the throw today by chance. Let the bolita mob find out the throw had been rigged and Louie would wash up on a Gulf beach some bright day.

It was easy enough to rig bolita. The way the game worked, you sold tickets, numbered from one to one hundred to coincide with the balls in the box. Then you chose some central place, like the room at the rear of that cigar store, for the throwing and you let carefully selected spectators look at the balls in the box to make sure they were all there. The balls were dumped from the box into a sack and the neck of the sack was tied.

Now the spectators moved back to the other side of the room and the sack was thrown to them like a bride throwing her corsage. The one who caught it felt around on the outside of the bag and selected a ball which was then tied off from the others in the sack by a string or a rubber band.

The number on the chosen ball was the winning number and it paid off seventy to one.

That was bolita, but Louie knew a few refinements on the game. The Spaniard was a sleight-of-hand artist. With twenty people watching closely, he could pull a heavily played pellet out of sight and into his pocket without any trouble at all.

Louie knew another trick, too, and it was this one he had chosen to use today. Out of the thousands of tickets sold, number sixteen got the lightest play—so sixteen had to win. The winning pellet had spent two hours in a deep-freeze unit and was still icy cold at the time of the toss. All that remained to do then was for the Spaniard to toss the sack to the right person, the tall man with the cigar, Stretch.

Stretch's fingers quickly found the chilly ball among the others through the sack.

And that was that.

No kid was going to spoil it.

"WHAT'S that?" his mother asked, glancing up from the mixing bowl to see him tossing a small ball from hand to hand.

"A ball," he said. "I found it in the gutter."

"In the gutter!" A horrified expression crossed her face. "It's probably filthy. Give it to me, Robbie. I'll wash it."

"It's not dirty," he said. He ran out of the kitchen with the ball.

"Robbie!" his mother shouted. "Wash up for dinner. I don't want your father to see you in that smelly polo shirt."

"It's the Flying Cubs," he replied from the living room, as if the name of his club somehow perfumed the shirt.

"I don't care what it is. And bring me that ball."

He brought it to her reluctantly and she examined it with a puzzled frown. "It's a nice enough ball. Well made. What do you suppose the number means?"

"Some kid probably dropped it," Robbie said. "It's from some kind of a kid's game."

"I guess so," she said absently, her mind now on dinner. She turned on the hot water in the sink, dipped the ball under it and scrubbed the ball with a vegetable brush. "There," she said, giving the ball back to the boy. "Now go clean up."

He left the kitchen, passing through the living room, and put the ball on the table next to the sofa. He went upstairs and peeled off his play clothes, changing into a clean white shirt. He hesitated, then decided not to change his dungarees. When he was dressed, he remembered that he had not yet washed. He went into the bathroom and washed his hands. Then, protecting the collar of his shirt, he washed his face very carefully and left a high-water ring around his neck.

His father was already home when he got downstairs. His father was a small, tired man with a lined face and worried eyes—but Robbie never saw his father that way. His father was a hero. His father had been to war in the navy. His father had been a yeoman, a kind of naval clerk and typist combined, and now his father was a clerk in an insurance office, but, as far as Robbie was concerned, there was no difference between a yeoman and a gunner's mate. Anyway, his father could tell exciting stories about the war, and if the heroic incidents had not happened to him but only to those whose records crossed his yeoman's desk, Robbie never knew it.

"What's this ball, son?" his father asked, holding the ball in his hand.

"I found it," Robbie said hastily, anxious to tell his father about the circus movie. "Dad, you should have seen the

movie. This one fellow is a lion tamer and the other fellow, the one the girl didn't love, is a—"

"I've never seen a ball quite like it."

"It was cold. Anyway, the girl thinks that the lion tamer—"

"Cold, you say?" his father asked thoughtfully.

"Like ice."

"It's warm now." His father shook the ball close to his ear. "How would it be cold? It's solid, not filled with water or anything."

"All I know is that it felt cold. Mother put it under hot water." Robbie saw he wasn't going to get anywhere with the story of the moving picture. He took the wooden ball from his father and went to the door to the kitchen. "How soon is dinner, Mom?"

"Not for another twenty minutes. Why?"

"I'm going outside for a little while. Maybe to the clubhouse."

"Don't get your clothes a mess—and when I call you, I want you to come right away, hear?"

Robbie mumbled something inaudible and scampered out the back door. He cut across the lawn and through the hedge to the back alley, then down the alley to the vacant lot in the middle of the block. The clubhouse was the tonneaux of two wrecked sedans, left in the lot years ago by their disgruntled owners, joined together with sheet tin and boards.

To get into the clubhouse, you had to crawl through the secret tunnel which popped up through the floor of one of the cars, but first you had to give the code knock of the Flying Cubs.

Robbie knocked: *Knock-knock*, then a pause, then, *knock-knock-knock*.

An answering knock came from inside.

A muffled voice then said, "Who is it?"

"Robbie. That you, Jim?"

"Yeah. I'll be right out. It's pretty smoky in here."

In a moment, a crate ten feet from the clubhouse lifted to one side and Jimmy came up out of the tunnel. He shifted the crate to hide the secret entrance and walked over to Robbie.

He let Robbie smell his breath. "Two of 'em. I smoked *two*."

Robbie stared at Jimmy in awe. "I get

sick," he said. He took the wooden ball from his pocket and looked at it as if he was surprised to see it, as if he had never seen it before.

"What kind of a ball is that?" Jimmy asked. "Let me see it."

"Wipe off your hands first."

Jimmy wiped his grubby hands on the front of his yellow polo shirt. He held out his hand to take the ball.

THE Spaniard, the man in gray—they called him Amigo, though he was no one's friend—thumbed through a comic book and listened to Stretch talk to the girl behind the soda fountain.

He heard Stretch say, "You got a gang of kids in the neighborhood call themselves the Flying Cubs?"

Then Amigo heard the girl say, "Sure. My kid brother's one of them."

"That so? What's his name?"

"Jimmy. Jimmy Nolan."

"What's he look like?"

"About twelve," the girl said. "A nice-looking youngster."

"Light hair?"

"No. As dark as mine." She touched her hair. It was jet black, silky, and it fell to her shoulders.

Amigo put down the comic book and went over to the counter. He smiled at the girl. Women liked Amigo's smile. It gave them the shivers.

"Where do these Flying Cubs hang out?" Amigo asked softly.

"In a clubhouse they've got over in the vacant— Say, what's it to you two where the kids hang out?" She gasped sharply. "They aren't in any trouble, are they?"

"No, not a bit," Stretch said. "We're interested in keeping them out of trouble. We want to give them some baseballs and gloves and things."

The girl sighed with relief. "The vacant lot on Albrey Street. They're good kids."

"Sure," Stretch said.

He and Amigo left the drugstore. They got into their car at the curb and sat quietly for a moment, thinking.

Finally, Amigo said, "Not Jimmy Nolan anyway. We want a kid with light hair."

"Let's go over there."

"A vacant lot on Albrey Street. You know where it is?"

Stretch nodded and started the car. . . .

It was a big deal. Jimmy had a penknife with two good blades and Robbie had always wanted it. That was the deal: the penknife for the wooden ball. Jimmy didn't know, he wasn't quite sure, he couldn't see what use he had for the ball, his old man would beat him for making a trade like that.

Well, then, if Jimmy didn't want the ball, of course—and Robbie reached out to take it back. But wait a minute, Jimmy hadn't said he actually didn't want the ball. All he said was—

"Robbie!" That was Robbie's mother calling him home to dinner.

"I've got to go," Robbie said. He didn't want to part with the ball now. He could think of plenty of ways to use a ball like that. "Give it here."

"Wait a sec," Jimmy said desperately, wanting the wooden ball now more than he had ever wanted anything in his life. "It's a deal. The knife for the ball."

Robbie hesitated but a moment. His mother was calling and there wasn't time to haggle. "Okay," he said.

Jimmy kept the ball and handed over his penknife.

Robbie slipped the knife into his pocket and ran across the lot to the alley. He paused a moment to look back at Jimmy. Jimmy was rubbing the smooth, hard ball against his cheek. There was a smile on Jimmy's face as he looked up to wave at Robbie.

At that moment, a big car pulled up in front of the lot on Albrey Street and two men got out. There was something vaguely familiar about the car and men, Robbie thought, but he didn't have time to wonder at them now. Dinner was waiting.

The men were walking across the lot toward Jimmy in his yellow polo shirt. It was strange, Robbie thought, Jimmy didn't look like himself at all. It was some trick of the setting sun as it reflected from the clubhouse dust which was thick in Jimmy's hair. From this distance, Jimmy almost looked blond.

Robbie turned and ran down the alley toward home. . . .

Les Roberts cruised in car 21 with his sidekick, Harry Laird, and when the call had come, sending 21 to a drugstore on Hiller, it had taken Les about three min-

utes to make the trip. He wished now that he hadn't hurried. Not that the black-haired girl at the soda fountain wasn't worth the trip, but what she said just didn't make sense.

"You say these two men looked suspicious," Les said, trying to appear grave. "All right, why did you wait fifteen minutes before calling the police?"

"I didn't think about it at first. It was only later that I got to thinking. I've got a feeling about those men."

Les exchanged glances with Harry. Thirty percent of their calls were concerned with women who received strange agitations from the spirit world. Most of the flighty women were older than this girl, though. Too bad. She was as pretty as they come.

"What made you suspect them?" Les asked with a straight face.

"They said they wanted to give the kids some baseballs and things like that. I believed it at first, but now I know they weren't men who'd be interested in making youngsters happy. And it seemed to me they were less interested in all the Flying Cubs than in one particular Flying Cub. The tall one asked me about a boy with light hair."

"All right," Les said. He closed his notebook and started toward the door. "Let's go over to the clubhouse, Harry."

"Will you come back and let me know?" the girl asked anxiously.

Les had already had something like that in mind. He had in mind coming back frequently. "I'll come back—" he opened his book to peek at her name—"Mary."

Out in the blue-and-white patrol car, Harry said, "This is nutty."

"You never know," Les said. "It might lead to something." He thought about the girl.

AT THE dinner table, his father looked at him sternly. "Robbie, what are you doing?"

The boy almost dropped the knife in his haste to get it back in his pocket. "Uh, nothing, Dad. I was just—"

"What were you playing with under the table?"

"A knife." He brought the knife out and showed it to his mother and father. "I got it in a trade from Jimmy Nolan."

His father took the knife and examined it. "It's a good knife, worth at least a dollar. What did you give him for it?"

"That wooden ball."

His mother gasped sharply and his father's face became stormy. "Robbie," his father said sharply, "that wasn't a fair trade."

"Jimmy wanted the ball, I wanted the knife, so—"

"Just the same, the ball wasn't worth anything. You'll have to take the knife back to Jimmy. I don't want to be harsh on you, son, but you took advantage of Jimmy in the trade. His folks can't afford to have him give away knives—knives cost money, you know—for a worthless wooden ball."

"Frank," Robbie's mother said to his father. "I wish you'd go with him. It's getting dark. I don't like him wandering in the streets after dark."

"All right," Robbie's father said, not too happy about it. He was usually dog-tired when he came home from work and he didn't like to stir from the house if he could help it. "I'll phone and make sure they're home."

He got up wearily from the table and went to the phone in the hall. He called the Nolan house and Mrs. Nolan answered.

"This is Frank Carr," Robbie's father said. "I was wondering if—"

"Oh!" Mrs. Nolan cried. "We were going to call you."

"About the knife? Well, I—"

"No, about Jimmy. He hasn't come home. We've looked everywhere. Even the police—"

"Wait, I'll ask Robbie." Frank Carr came back to the dining room. "Have you seen Jimmy, Robbie?"

"Not since I—" Robbie broke off sharply and his face turned pale. "The two men in the big car! They were the ones who—"

"What men, son?"

Robbie told his father, who listened gravely, then went back to the phone. "Mrs. Nolan, I don't think it's anything to worry about but . . ." and he told Mrs. Nolan what Robbie had told him. . . .

Jimmy had stood a moment to watch Robbie run down the alley, then had turned slowly toward the clubhouse, the smooth ball clutched tightly in his hand.

Not until he had almost reached the crate over the tunnel entrance had he seen the two men—a tall man with a cigar between his teeth, a shorter man dressed in gray—who were coming toward him.

They weren't men from the neighborhood, he was sure of that, and he stared at them curiously.

They stopped about ten feet from him. The tall man said, "You're a Flying Cub, eh?"

That was plain enough from the words on Jimmy's shirt. He just nodded his head, knowing instinctively that these men were bad men. Fear moved through him swiftly, causing his knees to tremble. There was a painful lump in his stomach, another unswallowable lump in his throat.

The men took two more steps and Jimmy backed up against the crate.

"That's not the kid," the man in gray muttered. "This one's hair is black. It just looked blond the way the sun was on it."

"I can see, can't I?" the other said. "But maybe this one knows the one we want."

"I h-have to go h-home," Jimmy said. "You know a nice guy in your outfit, a light-haired fellow?" the tall one said. "He wears dungarees and a cowboy belt."

That was Robbie Carr. Robbie was the only Flying Cub with a cowboy belt. "No," Jimmy said staunchly. "None of our gang has a—"

"Stop playing with him," the man in gray said to the other. He moved nearer to Jimmy, a bitter smile flickering at the corners of his thin mouth. "Listen, kid, you'll tell us or we'll—"

Jimmy didn't wait to hear him out. He knew the men would get him, knew that it would do no good to try to run away from them. But there was one place which always offered sanctuary. The clubhouse. It was the fort of the Flying Cubs. Nothing could happen to him in there.

He kicked the crate aside and dove like a frightened rabbit into the tunnel's mouth. He scampered through the tunnel and came up into the dim clubhouse. A little light filtered through a crack between the boards which were over the windows and Jimmy pressed his eye to the crack.

The men were talking outside in low tones, then the tall one came near to the

clubhouse. "Hey, kid," he said, "come on out. We won't hurt you. We just want to ask you a couple of questions."

"No."

"You answer the questions and we'll buy you a soda."

"No."

"Listen, kid, have you seen any of your gang with a little wooden ba—"

"Shut up," the man in gray said.

But the tall man had already said enough. Jimmy looked down in bewilderment at the ball in his hand. What did grown men want with a ball? It didn't make sense. But if the ball was all they wanted, perhaps they'd go away and leave him alone if he gave them the ball.

"What do you say, kid?" the tall man said, trying to sound friendly.

There was a secret trap in the clubhouse roof. Jimmy thought he could open that and throw the ball out to the men. But would they go away even then? Something, a warning voice, told him they wouldn't. They were after more than a ball. They wouldn't go to all this trouble just for a wooden ball.

"Go away," Jimmy said. "I'm not coming out."

The tall man cursed, but the man in gray grinned. "He'll come out, all right. We'll burn the club down." The man in gray got together a pile of dry grass and packed it against the wooden section which joined the two tonneaux.

The tall man broke up the crate and piled the pieces of wood on the dry grass.

Jimmy began to cry. His polo shirt was soaked with sweat and his face was sweaty and now he could taste the saltiness of his tears.

"Wait a minute," he heard the tall one say. "We must be nuts. If we set fire to it, we'll have the whole damned neighborhood out here in twenty seconds."

"Yeah," the other said disappointedly. "That's right."

Jimmy stopped crying and sat up straight.

"All right," the tall man said. "Then let's tear the shack down."

The two men went to work on the clubhouse, tearing away the boards with harsh shrieks of nails. It took them but a few minutes to tear down the impregnable fortress of the Flying Cubs—and then one of

the men, the dark one in gray, crawled in.

Jimmy backed into a corner, stark terror freezing his cries to the roof of his mouth.

But there was one thing he had that they didn't know he had; there was one thing they would never get.

Jimmy dropped the wooden ball under the soap box which served as council table for the Flying Cubs.

WHEN Robbie got to the clubhouse with his father, he saw two policemen and he felt better immediately. Policemen could do anything.

"Did you find him?" Robbie asked the nearest policeman. "Was Jimmy all right?"

"He wasn't here, son." The policeman turned to the other. "Harry, get out a description of the boy."

"Right, Les." Harry went back to the patrol car at the curb.

"Are you Robbie Carr?" the policeman named Les asked.

"Yes, sir."

"All right, Robbie," Les said wearily. He felt a little ill because he had doubted that girl back at the drugstore. "Tell me all about it."

Robbie told him about the ball. He gave a description of the two men. He described the car.

"That's a help, son," Les said gently. Harry was back by then and Les sent him to the car phone again to call in the new information. "And, listen, Harry, from what Robbie says, these guys couldn't have left here more than ten minutes ago. Tell them that at headquarters. Tell them to— Oh, hell, you know what to tell them."

For the first time, Robbie became fully conscious of the damage which had been done to the clubhouse. Sadly, he crawled into the wreckage, feeling his way in the dark interior. He bumped against the soapbox, heard something roll. He groped blindly and felt a smooth, hard ball.

He scrambled out of the clubhouse and ran to Les with the ball. "This is it. This is what the men wanted. It must have been because they dropped it and—" He broke off as a wave of nausea hit him. Those men were coming for *him*. They wanted him, not Jimmy.

"Bolita," Les said grimly, examining the ball. "Number sixteen."

"What does it mean?" Robbie's father asked.

"A bolita ball. Bolita, a stinking racket." Les looked at the ball again. "There are two ways. Find out who this ball was made for—it's legal enough to make them, illegal to use them—but that would take too long."

"What's the other way?" Robbie's father said. This was a strange, new world to Frank Carr. Police, gambling. He knew little about either.

"It may be too late for that, too. Go to that cigarstore. Make the owner tell who ran the throw. My money's on Louie Annata." Les frowned. "Yes, that's the best way—the only way."

He started toward the patrol car.

"What about—what about my boy?" Frank Carr asked, knowing the taste of fear. He was a hero in his son's eyes, a tired clerk in his own. He was not a coward but he knew his own limitations.

"You don't have to worry, Mr. Carr," Les said gently. "Those guys won't be back."

Frank Carr nodded in relief. He took his son by the hand and they walked together toward the alley and home. . . .

The man in gray was the worst. He smiled when he swung the belt. The tall man, though he didn't smile, was little better than the other. His fingers were powerful on Jimmy's wrist.

"All right!" Jimmy cried. There was an oath the Flying Cubs took: they swore never to squeal on a pal, no matter what. But this was different. "All right, I'll tell. Robbie Carr, he's the one who found it!"

"Light-haired kid?"

"Y-yes."

"Where does he live?"

Jimmy told them.

The tall one grunted, then said to the other, "Well, now what do we do with this one?"

The man in gray smiled. He grabbed Jimmy's arm and pulled him off the rutted lane into a field of stubby palmetto. . . .

The phone rang and Frank Carr answered it. When he came back to the living room, his face was gray.

"That was the policeman, Les," he told his wife and Robbie. "They caught someone named Louie Annata, but the others weren't with him and he said he didn't know anything about bolita. The police are holding him just the same. They closed up that cigar store, a few other places."

"That doesn't help Jimmy," Robbie's mother said.

"No."

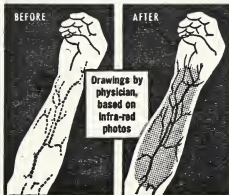
"It's my fault," Robbie sobbed. "If I hadn't swapped the ball for this knife—" he glowered at the knife, hating it—"Jimmy would be all right."

"Hush, son," Frank Carr said. "It wasn't your fault. How were you to know? And they didn't take Jimmy because of the ball, they didn't even know he had it. They took him to find out about you."

A chill gripped Frank Carr's heart in icy fingers. He sat down slowly and stared at the rug, hoping that Les knew what he was talking about.

"Jimmy wouldn't tell," Robbie said. "We've got an oath. I wish he would."

The oath of the Flying Cubs, Frank Carr thought. Boys with an oath. Frank Carr thought of the Nolans and their anx-



## HOW SLOAN'S LINIMENT AIDS MUSCULAR PAINS

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iety. He hoped for their sakes and for Jimmy's—and, yes, for his own sake and for Robbie's—that Jimmy would not try to hold out too long.

The phone rang again, and again Frank Carr hurriedly went out to the hall to answer it.

"Mr. Carr," a deep voice said quickly. "This is the police, Mr. Carr. Listen, we just found Jimmy and—"

Frank Carr looked beyond the phone at the front door. It was opening, slowly at first, then quickly with a sudden thrust against it. A smiling man in gray stepped into the hall. Behind him was another man, a tall man.

"Mr. Carr!" the policeman on the phone said. "Are you—"

Frank Carr found his voice. "Quick, quick, those—"

But he got no further. The man in gray took two long strides and jerked the phone from his hands. The man in gray dropped the phone into its cradle, then looked at Frank Carr sharply.

"Where's the kid?"

The tall man had walked to the door to the living room. "He's in here." He stepped into the living room.

"Hello, kid."

"Go on," the man in gray said, giving the stunned Frank Carr a push from the rear.

**F**RANK stumbled forward into the living room and saw his son cringing against the pillows at the end of the sofa. Robbie's face was a mask of frozen terror and his voice was pebbles rattling in his throat. The mother, too, was stricken with fear and her teeth were sunk deep into her lower lip.

Now was the time for men to become heroes, Frank Carr thought recklessly. Other men. He was not a man of strength and dynamic action. He was skilled in the

use of no weapons but the clerical pen and the *ratta-tat-tat* of the efficient adding machine. Man, from his birth, was trained not to carry a belligerent offensive but to turn the other cheek.

Torn between that which was expected of him, of any man, at a time like this and that which he knew it was impossible for him to do, Frank Carr slumped down on the sofa at his son's side and reached out to put a trembling hand on Robbie's arm, not so much to give comfort to the boy as to find, through this contact, a hidden source of strength deep, new within himself.

The man in gray, always smiling, stepped toward Robbie. "We want to talk to you, kid. Tell us—you ever see us before?"

"Yes, you're the men who—"

"That wasn't the right answer, kid," the tall one said. "Not the smart answer. Come on with us."

"Where are you taking him?" the mother said.

"I won't go!" Robbie shouted, kicking his feet.

"You'll go, all right," the man in gray said.

Frank Carr pressed his hands down on the sofa cushions. "You'll have to take us all." He felt something hard under his right hand and knew immediately what it was: the knife, the penknife. His thumb-nail picked at the groove in the longer blade. It wasn't much. A penknife was very little against two hard men who were probably armed, but the knife gave Frank Carr strength. He said sharply to his family:

"Don't move."

The tall man laughed outright and the gray man smiled.

"You take him, Stretch," the gray man said. The tall man nodded, coming toward Frank Carr.

The knife was open now, the blade was

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waiting, clenched tightly behind Frank Carr's hip.

The tall man grasped Frank by the shoulders and hauled him to his feet, and at that moment, while the two men stood close together, their chests almost touching, Frank brought the knife up from his hip and plunged it deep between the tall man's ribs.

Four years of war, never having heard a shot fired in anger; four years of war, never having seen one man die by another man's hand. Then to see it happen, see death come, in one's own living room was ironic. And Frank Carr stood stiffly, the knife still clenched in his hand, and watched the tall man collapse, twisting, to the floor.

It had happened so quickly. It took a moment for the smiling man in gray to realize what had happened. But when he at last saw, he no longer smiled. His right hand dipped swiftly under his jacket and came out again with a gun.

There was an instant when all time stood still for Frank Carr, an instant when there was motion nowhere in the world and everything poised in anxious suspension, waiting for the wheels to turn once more. The instant passed and Frank sprang and the gray man's gun went off—and then another gun from the doorway to the hall.

Strangely, Frank Carr was still alive, but the smiling man in gray lay on the floor and Les stood in the doorway, a smoking gun in his hand.

Les stepped into the living room and nudged the man in gray with his toe. "He'll live. He'll live long enough to testify against Annata." He moved a little further into the room and looked down at the tall man. "But not this one."

Les looked up at Frank Carr. "I'm sorry," he said humbly. "I came as soon as I could. I had them phone you from headquarters to tell you I was coming." "I didn't know," Frank said. "That's when these men came."

"You don't know about Jimmy then?"

"Is he— Is he—" Robbie couldn't finish it.

"No, Robbie," Les said. "He's alive. Badly beaten, but alive. He crawled to the road and stopped a car and got a message

to us. He wanted us to know these men were on their way here. He *had* to tell them, you understand?"

"Yes," Robbie said, tears for Jimmy in his eyes. "I know."

"Just so you understand. He was pretty worried about that." Les looked down at the men on the floor. "It could have been the other way and I would have felt like a murderer myself. I told you they wouldn't come here but they—" He straightened up. "We'll get this mess out of your living room, Mrs. Carr."

"Will—will my husband get in trouble for—"

"For protecting his own home? For defending his family? For killing a skunk? No, he won't get in trouble." Les turned to look at Frank Carr in admiration. "We should all get in this much trouble. You did a swell job, Mr. Carr."

Frank Carr said nothing but he saw his son beaming at him proudly and he felt good inside.

"Well," Les said, grinning sheepishly, "I'd better be going. Jimmy's folks will be worrying and his sister—I guess I'd better see her first."

He went out just as other men came in to take the tall man and the man in gray away, and then the Carrs were a family again.

"I'll make some coffee," the mother said. She went to the kitchen, leaving Robbie and Frank Carr alone.

Frank knew he should say something to soothe the ravaging effects of shock and terror in Robbie's impressionable mind. But for the life of him, he could think of nothing. He groped desperately for comforting words. None came.

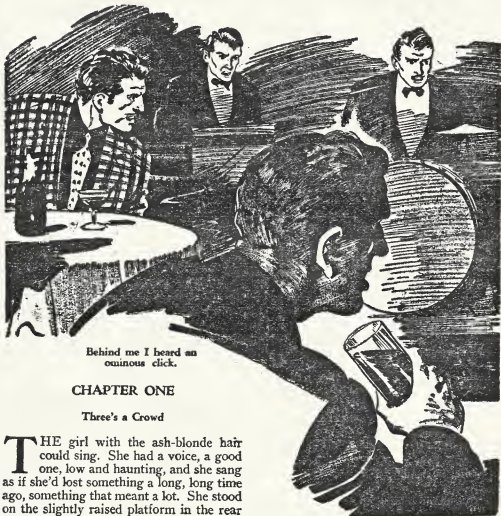
"Dad," Robbie began, and Frank braced himself for the hysterical outburst, long delayed, which he was sure would come. "Dad, I was telling you before but you wouldn't listen. You should have seen that circus movie! The lion-tamer was the good guy and the . . ."

Frank sighed deeply and settled himself against the cushions to relax and listen.

Everything was going to be all right. But his mind shot ahead to Christmas: no games with wooden balls, no wooden balls at all.

# LETHAL LEGACY FOR THE LADY

*From a cold deck  
the gungel dealt the flaming frail  
a pair of wings—  
and Shamus Blair . . . a murder rap.*



Behind me I heard an  
ominous click.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Three's a Crowd

THE girl with the ash-blond hair could sing. She had a voice, a good one, low and haunting, and she sang as if she'd lost something a long, long time ago, something that meant a lot. She stood on the slightly raised platform in the rear

## Thrill-Propelled Detective Novelties

By **HANK SEARLS**



of the shadowy cocktail lounge, leaning on the piano, and singing in this sad, empty voice.

She had a voice, and a figure, and level gray eyes, and a cool, impassive face. She had everything, and she was singing to me. I ordered a drink.

The song ended on a plaintive note. A few of the people at the bar and the tables

clapped. The blonde gave them a half-smile and started for my table, swiftly touching the tight knot on the back of her head. She slid into the seat opposite me and put out her hand. I took it.

"Mr. Blair?" she asked.

"Mike to you."

She gave me a fleeting smile. "I'm sorry that I couldn't come to your office, but I had the six o'clock show to do, and I wanted to see you right away."

"Quite all right," I said. "This is my cocktail hour, anyway. You sing beautifully, Miss Forrest."

She shook her head. "No. I don't have much of a voice. It's only that I try to sing as if I'd just lost my man in a crap game."

I laughed. "You sound like your father."

"Did you know Ace?"

"Everybody knew Ace. What are you drinking?"

"Scotch and water. And thanks."

"Thanks for what?"

"For not trying to tell me what a fine, upstanding citizen my father was."

I shrugged. "He was honest, as gamblers go."

"He was a heel."

He was a heel. Elegy. A guy gets knocked off by a person or persons unknown, and there is great mourning throughout the land. His daughter, who ought to know, says: *He was a heel*. Well, he was. I finished my drink and pulled up my chair.

"Miss Forrest, why did you phone me?"

"Cindy." Her cool gray eyes smiled at me.

"OK, Cindy. Why did you call me?"

"It's about my father's last request."

"I'm a private investigator, not a lawyer."

"This is a job for a private investigator. I want you to find a girl."

I toyed with the ice in my glass. "That's not so easy. I've been trying to find a girl all my life, and look at me now."

She smiled absently. "The girl's name is Lenore Marlowe. She's a dancer. She danced at the Moonbeam Club three years ago. My father went with her for a long time, and then he got tired of her and she dropped out of sight."

"Three years ago? That's a big order. What's she look like?"

"She's beautiful. A redhead, the sultry kind."

Well, good.

"All right. I'll do my best. Is there anything else I ought to know?"

She studied me. "I want you to bring her back, wherever she is."

I thought it over. "That might be a little tougher. Would you like to tell me why you want her?"

She hesitated.

"My father was a funny guy—he had a strange sense of humor. He didn't leave a will. And he hated me. Ordinarily, the Moonbeam Club, the money, everything, would go to me, of course, since my mother's dead. But the last time I saw him, two years ago, he told me what he wanted done if he died."

I ordered two more drinks and sat back to listen.

"He knew I hated him for being a gambler—I know, it could have been worse, but all my life, all through school, people knew, and I . . . I felt that I had to live it down. As a result I developed almost a psychosis about gambling. I got over it, really; I even play the horses sometimes myself, now, but two years ago I was very rabid on the subject."

She sipped her drink.

"He knew it, of course. The last time I saw him he told me that he couldn't make up his mind what he wanted done with the Moonbeam Club if he died. I think he knew that he might be killed in some sort of a mess, just as he was. He said that since he couldn't make up his mind, he wanted the three people he thought were entitled to the club to cut cards for it."

I whistled. "That's about a half a million bucks worth of property. Who did he say was entitled to it?"

"Myself, and Vince Populo, the manager, and . . . Lenore Marlowe."

"The redhead? What was she to him?"

"Not any more than the other floozies he ran around with. But he knew I hated her, and he knew that I didn't like to gamble, and that's the lovely way he thought of to make me suffer."

"Did he put it in writing?"

"No."

"Does anybody know it?"

She shook her head. "No. I'm telling Vince tonight, and when you find the girl

we'll go through with the fiasco, and that'll be that."

I studied her curiously. She was either stupid or honest; honest beyond belief. And she didn't look stupid.

"Are you sure you want me to find her?"

She nodded.

"I know what you're thinking. I know that you think I'm weird. But that was another of his little tricks. He didn't care who got the club—but he thought I'd ignore his wishes, and then have it on my conscience the rest of my life. Well, I won't. We'll cut for the club, and whoever gets it, gets it. Period."

I shrugged.

"OK, Cindy, if that's the way you want it. But I think you might be making a mistake . . ."

ORDINARILY it's not hard to trace a dancer, or a singer, or an actress. You wire the agent and he tells you where the last booking was and you start from there. So I got a wire, collect, that the last booking listed for Lenore Marlowe was the Moonbeam Club in San Francisco, three years ago. And that was that.

None of the showgirls at the Moonbeam Club had been there for more than a year, but the headwaiter had been there for six and he thought he remembered that the redhead had lived at the Hotel Cardinal, only don't tell his wife he remembered.

At the Cardinal, they told me that their last mailing address was a little hotel on Bush Street. I hopped a cable car to the little hotel on Bush Street and found that it had been torn down two years ago. Dead end. From there on, it would have to be leg work. And I don't like leg work.

I tried every night club in town, with no luck. Then I started on the dance halls—same result. I tried three burlesque houses. Still no soap, although the manager of one said he knew lots of redheads, and would I like to meet a little number that just came in from Kansas City.

The last burlesque house was the bottom of the barrel—a little dump in Chinatown that smelled of stale cigar smoke and popcorn and rotten peanut shells. It was noon when I walked in. There was an old joker sweeping out the seats. I dragged my weary feet down the aisle and asked

him for the manager. He said he was the manager and he didn't want any. I asked him about a redhead named Lenore Marlowe and he looked at me suspiciously.

"Why?"

"She's inherited some money. Kind of."

He chuckled. "Yeah, that's what they all say. How much does she owe you?"

"Do you know her or not?"

He smiled. "Sure. A stripper. Never forget a . . . a face." He chuckled toothlessly. He moved his hands expressively. "Stacked! Did a strip here—let's see—in forty-six. Left here for Mexico City. Owed me two-weeks' advanced salary. Hope you find her."

I started up the aisle.

"Hey, when you give her that money she inherited, tell her to remember old Louie." He exploded in a paroxysm of mirth.

Well, it was a lead, and it explained why the agent didn't have her address. I cabled Juan Perez in Mexico City and got an answer:

MARLOWE PLAYED ONE SUMMER RICARDO CLUB HERE. STANK. DRANK LIKE TANK. FIRED. LAST HEARD FROM PANAMA CITY. LOVE AND KISSES. JUAN.

Lenore Marlowe was apparently hitting the skids, but good. I phoned the cocktail lounge for Cindy and they told me that she was at the Moonbeam Club. I drove to the city limits and on to the club.



It was quite a place. From the outside it was a palatial roadhouse; inside it was all sectional furniture and knee-deep carpeting. When I asked for Cindy Forrest, the headwaiter took me through a room full of blackjack tables and slot machines to a door marked *Manager*. He knocked twice, waited, and knocked again. The door opened partially and a pair of suspicious eyes peered out.

"Mr. Blair to see Miss Marlowe," said the headwaiter. I walked in.

Behind a desk that you could drive a

car into sat a short, merry little man with a dark complexion and glasses two inches thick, smoking a cigar. Behind him, leaning back on a chair, sat a good-looking blond kid with hard eyes, a gunman from his curly hair to his pointed shoes.

On a couch sat Cindy, her beautiful legs crossed, smoking a cigarette. Next to her a lanky, horse-faced character in a rumpled shirt, an individual I recognized as Slim Caper, the slickest blackjack dealer west of the Mississippi. The guy behind the desk stood up and stuck out his hand. I took it. It felt like a limp fish.

"So you're Mike Blair? Well, I've wanted to meet you. Populo is the name—Vince Populo. And that's Sweet-Boy Hines—he was Ace's chauffeur before Ace was killed—and Slim Caper. Since Miss Forrest hired you, I presume you're acquainted."

I nodded. "Slim I met in Reno once. It was expensive."

Slim chuckled. "That's right. I never forget a pair of hands. You lost eight hundred and thirty-eight dollars in half an hour. Right?"

"Yeah," I said wryly. "Never play against the house."

"Well," asked Populo. "What have you discovered about Miss Marlowe?"

**A**LREADY I didn't like Populo. He was too damned eager; he seemed to forget that his chance at the club was purely charity. I looked at Cindy. She nodded.

"I've told Vince about my father's . . . whim. You can speak freely."

"Yes," said Populo. "We're all on the same team. We all want to find Miss Marlowe and get this thing over with."

*I'll bet you want to find Miss Marlowe, I thought. Like I want to find my landlady.* I shrugged. I said to Cindy:

"I think she's in Panama. That's why I came out here. If you want me to catch Pan American I can get a passport and fly down there tonight. It'll cost, though."

Cindy nodded. "You'll better go. We'll have to find her."

"OK," I said. "That's all I wanted to know." I turned to leave. "I'm going back to town, Miss Forrest, if you'd like a ride."

She got up. "Thanks, I'll take you up

on that. I'm all through here. Wait until I rebuild my face."

She gathered her belongings and went out a side door. A subtle change came over Populo. He motioned to the couch.

"Sit down, Blair," he said. "I've got a proposition."

I knew what the proposition was, but I sat down.

"You're a businessman, Blair, and I have a deal for you. I guess you know what it is."

I smiled sweetly. "You want to cut down your odds."

He inclined his head slightly. I went on:

"In other words, Lenore Marlowe can't be found in Panama, whether she's there or not."

"That's right." The glasses glistened.

"And what's in it for me?"

"A thousand."

"Come on, now. The odds against your winning half a million are two to one. I cut them to even money and you want to give me one stinking grand. You can do better than that."

"Five grand, and that's tops."

I stood up. "Five grand, ten grand, five hundred grand. You know what you can do with your money?"

Populo held up his hand. "Wait a minute, sonny."

"You wait, brother. I'll find that girl if I have to swim up the Amazon to do it."

Populo nodded to Sweet-Boy. The kid stood up, fingering a bulge in his coat.

"Blair," said Populo. "If you don't play ball you aren't going to be around after the game."

I walked to the desk. I took the cigar out of Populo's mouth and ground it out on the lapel of his brown, expensive sport coat. There was a smell of burning camel's hair. His face turned purple and he beat at his chest.

"Blair," he sputtered. "Blair, I'll—"

"Tell Miss Forrest I've gone out to get some air. In here, it smells."

As I walked past Slim Caper, I saw his lean, humorous face twist into a wink.

Cindy found me standing on the spacious porch of the club, smoking a cigarette. I helped her into my car and we started for town.

"Honey," I said. "Watch Populo."



"I am. Why do you say that?" She looked surprised.

I told her about the proposition. Her face became thoughtful. Finally she turned and smiled.

"Thanks, Mike. Thanks a lot."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Ace of Spades

I STEPPED off the plane at Panama and into a steaming, tropical furnace. After San Francisco, the place was almost unbearable. I took a cab to the best hotel in town and shaved and showered. Then I went down to the bar and had a tall, cold rum collins. It almost cured the heat, so I had another. The barkeep was an enormous, choleric individual wearing the map of County Cork for a face.

"I don't suppose you speak English," I said.

"Only the simplest words, me boy. Only the simplest words."

"Do you know a readhead down here by the name of Marlowe? Lenore Marlowe?"

"Oh, me boy, there're more redheads down here than ye can shake a stick at. What would ye be wantin' with this particular one?"

"She might inherit some money, if I can find her."

He looked at me closely. Finally he seemed satisfied.

"Blue Moon Club. Floor show at nine p.m. She'll be there."

He walked away, polishing a glass. I looked at my watch. It was four p.m. I had five hours. Five hours meant five

more rum collins' to keep me occupied.

Five hours meant ten or twelve rum collins', once I got rolling. And if it hadn't been for the bartender reminding me of the time, I might have spent the night, and been a hell of a lot better off. But he showed me his watch, and called a cab, and I was off into the tropical night.

We roared through the narrow streets at seventy or eighty miles an hour and screamed to a stop in front of a cheap, neon-lighted nightclub. I pushed my way past the surly natives outside, and through the swinging door.

Half the U.S. Fleet was inside, trying to float itself, and a few *touristas* from the States, and about three Blue Moon girls for every male in the place. I sat at the bar and a short, swarthy barkeep wiped the liquor away from in front of me. I ordered a rum collins and asked for Lenore Marlowe.

He mixed the drink and came back.

"Señorita Marlowe? She ees dancing now. You go back there, you see her. One dollar, American, for the collins."

I tossed a dollar on the bar and started for the rear. Two Blue Moon girls converged on me, grabbing my arm and the other running her hand through my hair. "You buy me a drink, no?" they said in unison.

"No," I agreed, shouldering them aside. I walked through a door and a guy in the uniform of the Panama police stopped me. "Two-dollar cover charge," he said, holding out his hand. I sighed and dropped two bucks into his hand.

A waiter came up and said: "Eet is not allowed you bring your drink in here." I gulped down the collins and handed him

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the glass with a sigh. This was Panama.

He showed me a table and said: "One rum collins, hokay?" He darted off into the darkness and I looked up at the stage. A fat, dark individual in a yellow sport coat, sweat streaming from his face, was shouting into a microphone in Spanish. He paused, wiped his brow, and repeated the announcement in English:

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, we are 'appy to bring you, from the exclusive Stork Club in the Estados Unidos . . . Miss Lenore Marlowe, in her classic interpretation: Flame of Love!"

He waddled off, clapping vigorously. There were whistles and catcalls from the audience. The lights dimmed to a hazy violet, and she drifted out from the wings.

She might have hit the skids, but she still had what it took. She danced gracefully, her body writhing to the muted strains of the brassy orchestra. Her hair was a golden flame shimmering in the spotlight, and her eyes were two green pools of promise.

Her body was slender and curved in all the right places, and she knew how to use it. She was definitely not a bump and grind artist; she had a style all her own, too good for the audience.

When the harsh spotlight hit her and she disappeared, the house came apart at the seams. The audience went wild. A drunken sailor started for the stage and had to be restrained by two of his mates. The redhead appeared for another second and then stepped back into the wings, and the orchestra took up the strains of a Spanish dance. A couple of the Blue Moon girls dragged their customers out onto the dance floor, and the show was over.

My waiter came back with a drink. I whipped out a pencil and wrote a note. "Bring this to Miss Marlowe," I said, slipping him a fin.

"Si, señor." He dodged off into the crowd. I sipped the drink and waited. In a few minutes she appeared from out of the smoke and slid into the chair opposite me.

SHE was as beautiful off the stage as on it, but close up you could read the disillusion in her eyes, and close up her mouth was not as soft. She looked at me appraisingly and flipped my note onto the

table, waiting for my opening gambit. "Drink?" I asked.

She nodded and called to the waiter in Spanish. Immediately he appeared with a double shot of whiskey. She tossed it off and looked into my eyes.

"So you're a friend of Ace Forrest," she said.

"I knew him. He's dead."

"Too bad," she said, lighting a cigarette.

"Who do we have to thank for that?"

Ace, I decided, was definitely not the popularity kid.

"They don't know. That's beside the point. I was sent down here by his daughter to bring you back to the States."

"His daughter? Why?" Her eyes were hard, now; hard and suspicious.

I hated to tell her.

"Ace wanted his daughter, and you, and Vine Populo, to cut cards for the club after he died."

She sat up suddenly, her eyes alight.

"What?"

"That's right. Nothing in writing—just a last request to his daughter. And she's going through with it."

She sat back and laughed. "You mean," she asked incredulously. "That girl sent you all the way down here to get me so I could cut cards for her old man's club?"

I nodded.

"I don't believe it."

I got up. "OK. I'll take back word that you're not interested."

"Wait," she said, raising her hand. "Tell me more."

I sat down. "There's nothing more to tell you. That was his last request, and Cindy Forrest is going through with it. You have one chance in three to win a half-a-million bucks worth of property. Take it or leave it."

She shook her head slowly.

"I'll be damned." She paused. "And she hated me, too. You know, Mr.—" she looked at the note—"Mr. Blair, I always knew that girl was a thoroughbred. She didn't like me, but she was a thoroughbred. You can tell, when you see as few of them as I do."

I agreed. She went on thoughtfully:

"I guess that the thing for me to do is to refuse." She puffed her cigarette. She looked at me almost childishly. "That's what I ought to do, isn't it, Mr. Blair?"

I began to like her. "Mike's the name. And it's entirely up to you."

She thought for a long time. "It's funny. All my life I've dreamed of a chance for something like this. And now that it's come . . ." Her eyes were far away. "Clothes, and nice places. No more stinking dives, and no more heels to be nice to." She smiled.

"Ace used to tell me that if I stuck with him I'd be wearing diamonds. It's just like him to put me in a spot like this. All my life, if I won, I'd have it on my mind." She paused. Decisively she ground out her cigarette.

"That place belongs to Cindy. Deal me out."

*Well, I thought, I'll be damned. You never know.* I smiled at her and took her hand.

"Nice going, kid. How about a bottle of champagne?"

She nodded, her eyes swimming. We had the champagne and ordered another bottle, and drank it, and ordered another. Then the fat, greasy M.C. stopped at the table, nodded coolly to me, and showed his watch to Lenore. She sighed and arose.

"I have to go on once more. Will you be here when I get through?"

I grinned happily. "Wild horses couldn't drag me away." This promised, I told myself, to be quite a night. It turned out to be quite a night, all right. . . .

It was the same act, but this time she was dancing to me. I lifted a champagne glass to her and she smiled. She whirled and pirouetted sinuously, her veils flowing about her. Then came the breathless moment when she stood like a Grecian statue before the gaping mob.

Behind me I heard an ominous click in my ear and then a blast that shook the house. Before I whirled I saw the redhead's face twist into a grimace of disbelief as she pitched forward over the footlights, a red stain spreading over her chest.

I was up instinctively. In the dim light I saw a shape moving toward the door and the glint of an automatic. There was another blast and a tinkle of glass from the spotlight, and then darkness. For a moment there was a deep, awed silence, and, suddenly, bedlam. A hand clutched me and I dodged away, after the shape in the

dark, while the crowd pressed forward.

A woman shrieked and then another, and a man cursed in Spanish. I heard a bottle break and the thud of a body. A knife ripped at my coat as I fought my way out. The lights went on again and I took a last look at the redhead, crumpled helplessly on the stage.

Then I was out in the humid night, listening to the clash of gears and the squeal of tires. I looked wildly about for a taxi. There was none in sight. Behind me I heard one crazy shout—"El Gringo" The foreigner—Me.

The shout was taken up and rose to a roar. I heard the crash of a door and the slap of feet on the cobblestones. This was no place for me.

**I** DODGED up an alley and cut across a muddy yard. I ran up a side street and doubled back, trying to find the business section of town. In three minutes I was exhausted and lost. But the voice of the mob was fading in the distance. I sat on a curb and thought.

Whoever had shot the redhead had escaped. And half of Panama City was looking for me. I tried to think of the clues I'd left behind. My name in the hotel register, and the note on the table of the nightclub. And I'd asked the bartender at the hotel where I could find the redhead.

It was enough for the most ineffectual police in the world. I dug a schedule of air-flights out of my pocket. I looked at my watch. My reservation was for tomorrow, but there was a flight tonight—twenty minutes. It meant leaving my suitcase at the hotel, but what the hell. A taxi squealed around the corner and I flagged it. . . .

The girl at the ticket counter was dubious. She pursed pretty lips and said: "Señor Blair, your reservation is for tomorrow. Tonight's plane is filled up."

I tried to keep my voice steady. "It's very important."

"Of course, if somebody does not show, we will be most pleased to change your reservation."

So I waited until plane time, and tried to count the passengers, and smoked half a pack of cigarettes, and sweated every time I saw a uniform come into the terminal. The thing seemed to boil down to one Señor Lampert, a New Orleans passenger,

who hadn't appeared yet. The girl paged him over the speaker and then paged him again. Finally she turned to me with a smile.

"It looks like Señor Lampert has had a bad farewell party. We will give him your reservation if he comes tomorrow."

I didn't wait to thank her. I was scrambling up the ladder into the DC-4. I sat by the window nearest the terminal. I started to sweat. I sweated while the plane taxied out to the runway, and kept sweating while the pilot checked his mags. Finally we were off down the runway in a surge of power. I sat back and tried to relax. . . .

Customs at New Orleans was rugged. I waited in line while they inspected baggage, feeling like a murderer on a scaffold. At first they didn't believe that I didn't have any luggage. They checked my passport closely and finally brought me down to the immigration office. A little guy with a long nose looked me over and decided that I wasn't Hitler. In the end they signed my clearance.

As I turned to leave, the phone rang. The little guy picked it up.

"Fugitive from Panama justice," he repeated pompously. "Murder?" He took the phone from his ear and looked up at me. My heart stopped. "Gotta pencil, Mac?"

I handed him my pen and started for the door.

"What's the name?" asked the little guy into the phone.

I slammed the door and started down the corridor. I grabbed a cab and had the driver take me to the train station. I bought a ticket to Jacksonville.

It was a long, dirty ride, but I was still one step ahead of the Panama Police, and gaining all the time. I flew from Jacksonville to Dallas, where at one airline counter I bought a ticket to New York under my own name and at another counter a ticket to San Francisco, under a name I'd never heard before. I'd left a trail across the South that would take them weeks to untangle. I hoped.

San Francisco looked like heaven to me, but it was no time to go into raptures. I bought a shave and a shine at the airport and decided to look up my client. I picked up my car and drove to the little cocktail lounge. It was six-thirty, and Cindy was

just finishing her stint. She smiled when she saw me and cut off her song at the chorus. She moved to the table and sat down.

"Did you find her, Mike?" she asked quietly.

"Yeah." I ordered drinks. "Yeah, I found her."

"Where is she?"

"She's dead."

The color left her face. "Dead?"

"Murdered."

Her voice was tight. "By whom?"

I smiled obliquely. "I don't know. According to the Panamanians, me."

She was startled. I told her the story. When she heard that the redhead had decided to give up her chance for the nightclub, her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, that poor girl. Down there in the tropics, dancing for peanuts, and she wouldn't take advantage of—"

"Yeah," I said. "It's tough. Well, anyway, I'm wanted. What would you like me to do now?"

She studied me for a while.

"You're in enough trouble. I can't ask you to go on with this; to get involved any more. Tell me how much I owe you, and if there's anything I can do about the other."

I laughed. "Sure. That's all we have to do. Tell the cops you hired me to go down there and find the girl. Then we'd both be in the soup."

"I'm sorry I got you into this, Mike. But as I said, you're free to quit now."

I shoved my chair away from the table and looked at her.

"Listen, sister, what kind of a guy do you think I am? You think I like being used as a finger by a cheap, tinhorn gambler? You think I'm going to take that lying down? You think I'm going to be the fall guy? Hell no!" I paused. "You know who did this as well as I do."

She hesitated. "Vince Populo? I can't believe it."

"Vince Populo. Not Vince himself—hell, no. One of his boys." I lit a cigarette. "No, sweetheart, I'm in this now. You're stuck with me. Until the final whistle."

She sipped her drink miserably. "Whatever you say, Mike."

I nodded. "And another thing—when we solve this one, if we do, we'll know

who killed Ace Forrest. If anybody cares."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Playing Against the House

**W**HATEVER I was going to do, it had to be quick. Crimes committed out of the country come under the FBI, and those babies work fast. Also, they had my regular hotel address at the passport bureau: It was taking a chance, but I had to have a gun, and I decided that it had to be done. I drove to my hotel.

There was nobody in the lobby that looked particularly Federal, so I went up to my room. Cautiously I opened the door. There was no one there. I went to the closet and got my gun, picked up some spare shaving gear, and left. On the way out, the desk clerk called me over.

"There's a man asked if you were in this morning, Mr. Blair. He's been waiting to see you ever since. He just stepped out of the lobby for a moment. Said he'd be right back."

It was that close. I went out the back way and got into my car. I started for the Moonbeam Club.

It was dark by the time I got there. I left the long line of cars dislodging passengers at the entrance and parked my car myself, outside the lot, just in case I needed it in a hurry.

I walked to the door and went in. The headwaiter looked at me curiously and asked if I wanted a table. I said no, I wanted to see Populo. He told me to wait, Populo was busy. I fingered the gun under my coat and said that I was busy too.

He changed his mind and led me to the office. He knocked and turned to me: "See? Nobody there."

I knocked twice, waited, and knocked again. In a moment the door opened. I slipped the gun out of my coat and walked in.

Sweet-Boy Hines was at the door and Populo was sitting behind his desk, smoking a cigar. He stood up, surprise on his face.

"Well, Blair. Glad to see you. Why the artillery?"

"OK, Populo. Skip the act. Who killed the Marlowe dame?"

Populo looked at me as if I was crazy.

"Did somebody kill her? Sit down. Relax."

I stayed up, keeping one eye on Sweet-Boy and the other on Populo.

"You know damned well somebody killed her. Who was it?"

He was the picture of injured innocence. "How should I know?"

"Look," I said. I was about to misquote Cindy, and I hoped that she wouldn't mind if she heard. "Your chance at this property is contingent on Miss Forrest's not changing her mind. Well, she's changing her mind unless the guy who killed the redhead is turned over to the cops. You can take it from there."

I backed toward the door. "It's up to you, Populo." I groped for the knob and found it. "And you have until tomorrow." There was a movement behind me and I whirled. I caught a glimpse of a giant in a waiter's jacket. Then there was a blinding flash and deep, silent, darkness. . . .

When I woke up, it was with a plitting, grinding headache. Sweet-Boy was towering over me, staring at me intently. I was on the couch in the office. Populo was

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working industriously at the big desk.

"He's come to, boss. What you want me to do?"

Populo didn't look up from his papers. "Work him over."

I started to get up and got the flat of a gun across my mouth. I tried again, and took a glancing blow to the temple. I lay still and took two jabs in the face. There was no future in that so I struggled to a sitting position. There was a crashing blow on my neck and the lights went out again. . . .

The second time I came to Populo was standing over me. "You had enough, Blair?"

As a matter of fact, I had. "Yeah."

"Look, Blair. I got enough troubles. People trying to move in on us, guys welching on bets. I don't need any private eyes pestering me. Get out of town. If I see you around here again, I'll put you out of commission for good. Understand?"

I nodded painfully.

"Give him back his gun and take him out the side door, so he won't get blood on the rugs," said Populo. . . .

When I got back to town I called Cindy, to tell her that we weren't going to get anything out of Populo, and to advise her to take over the club and quit the foolishness. The bartender at the lounge said that she'd had an urgent phone call at seven and gone out, leaving word that she'd be back for the nine o'clock show. I went down to the lounge.

It was nine when I got there—and still no Cindy. The manager was irritated. By ten I was getting worried. I phoned her apartment—no answer. I called the Moonbeam Club—they claimed she wasn't there. The thing began to smell.

I went outside to the taxi stand. There was a driver asleep in his cab. I stuck my head in the window and woke him.

"You been here long?"

"All night," he muttered sleepily. "Off and on." He peered at my face. "Say, what did you run into?"

"Skip it. Did you see a blonde come out of there, around seven o'clock?"

"Lots of blondes come out of that place. You don't mean the singer?"

"Yeah."

"I thought there was something phony about that. She come out about seven and

started down the street. A black sedan pulls up alongside her and a big guy gets out and helps her in. . . . Say, is there something wrong?"

"You're damn right there's something wrong." I started for my car.

"You want I should call the cops?" yelled the driver.

"No. I know where she went."

SO I drove to the Moonbeam Club again, with fear for the blonde gnawing at my guts and anger seething inside me. I took out my automatic and cocked it. It was one thing to send a hood to Panama to kill off a dancer in a fifth-rate dive. Kidnapping the owner's daughter was something else. Populo must have been desperate.

I parked my car by the side entrance and tried the door. It was open. I sneaked down the passage to Populo's office. I gave the two knocks, waited, and knocked again. They hadn't changed their signals. The door opened and I shoved my way in, gun out and finger itching on the trigger.

Populo and Sweet-Boy were still there. Slim Caper was lounging on the couch. When Populo saw me, he cursed.

"You don't learn very easy, do you, Blair?"

"Where's Cindy?"

"What do you mean?"

"Where is she?"

"At the place where she sings, I guess. Why?"

Populo and his injured innocence were getting too much for me. I felt the blood rising in my face.

"Look: kidnapping is a federal offense. If you don't produce her in two minutes I'm calling the FBI."

Populo shrugged. "Go ahead. But I think you're nuts. She probably just went out for a sandwich."

"Yeah? With a big black sedan full of guys. All good clean fun."

A shadow of concern crossed Populo's face. "A black sedan? Say—"

"Yeah, Snow White?"

"It was a black sedan that ran her father and Sweet-Boy off the road last week. Do you think—"

"I think the black sedan belongs to you. And I think you've got Cindy, and that's what I'm telling the FBI." I walked to the

phone. The FBI might pick me up, but they had better facilities for finding the blonde than I did.

I lifted the phone, covering the room with my gun. Suddenly Sweet-Boy cocked his ear.

"Boss," he said. "There's somebody out there in the bushes."

Populo shoved his chair back and leaped for the window. For a moment he stood silhouetted in the light from the parking lot, and then there was the crash of a forty-five outside and he spun to the floor. There was a thud as a slug buried itself in the pine-paneled wall on the other side of the room. I dropped the phone into its cradle and hit the deck.

"Get the lights," yelled Populo. Slim Capar was across the room in two giant strides, and the lights clicked out. In the glow from the window, I saw Sweet-Boy draw his gun. He fired twice, blindly, into the night. Then there was the sound of a high-powered engine and a clash of gears. Populo grunted and hoisted himself to his feet. He peered into the darkness.

"Turn on the lights," he said. "There's your black sedan, Blair. Go chase that for a while." He walked back and collapsed in his chair, mopping his brow. "Sometimes," he said softly, "I think I'll get out of this racket."

My brain was whirling. "Who the hell was that?" I asked stupidly.

"Don't we wish we knew. Somebody's trying to move in on us, Blair. Can't you get that straight? They killed Ace Forrest and they killed that redhead, and they've got Ace's daughter, and they just tried to kill me. Somebody who knows about Ace's last request—somebody who figures if

there's nobody left to draw for the club, he can get it cheap."

He jerked his chair to his desk and looked up at me. "Listen. Who gets this place if Cindy is dead? Me?"

I shook my head. He continued:

"Hell, no. I'm just the manager. You think I want her killed? Why, as long as she lives I've got a chance to win the place, no strings. And if I lose and she keeps it, I'll still be manager. You think I had her snatched? Use your head."

I thought it over. He made sense.

"I guess not. But who is it, then?"

"You're a hot-shot private eye. You tell me."

I slipped my automatic back into the holster. "Maybe I will," I said. "Maybe I will. . . ."

IT WAS too late that night to do anything, so I drove back to town and got a room at a cheap hotel on Bush Street. I flopped on the bed and tried to collect my thoughts.

If Populo hadn't had the redhead killed and the blonde kidnapped, who the hell had? An outside outfit trying to move in, like he said, maybe. Of course, it was to Populo's advantage to have the redhead killed, and the blonde might have been kidnapped to confuse the issue. That still left the mystery of who had taken a shot at Populo. That might have been faked too, of course.

No, nobody stands in a window, making like William Tell's son, just to impress a private eye. Besides, they hadn't known I was coming back—they wouldn't have had time to plan the act. And Populo said that there was an outfit trying to move in.



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I closed my eyes and tried to sleep. I tossed and turned and punched my pillow. No soap. I thought of the blonde, tied up somewhere, gagged. I thought of the blonde at the bottom of the bay. I thought of the blonde in a ditch, moaning for help. I tossed my feet over the side of the bed and lit a cigarette.

Whoever had killed the redhead had known that I was going down to Panama to find her. It wasn't a coincidence that she'd been killed the night I caught up with her. It wasn't by chance that the shot had been fired from behind my right shoulder. I'd been used, but good. I'd been used as a finger, and framed.

So whoever had killed her had known I was going down. Who knew I was going? The blonde—she was out. Populo—he had plenty to gain by her death, but somehow I was beginning to believe him. Sweet-Boy and Slim Capen—and they both worked for Populo.

I walked to the window and looked out at the gray dawn breaking over the fire-escapes and roof tops. Then I had it.

Passport pictures. Whoever had followed me to Panama had got himself a passport. In order to get the passport he'd had to get a passport picture. All I had to do was check on the photographers who specialized in passport pictures, and if I saw anyone's picture I recognized, I was in.

I switched on the light and picked up the phone book. I turned to the classified section, under photographers, and groaned. There must have been sixty of them doing nothing but passport work. I tore out the sheet. Today, I told myself, was going to be quite a day.

Leg work. Anybody who thinks the private eye has it soft ought to try the leg work. You take a taxi because you can't park downtown, and you climb up stairs, and you talk to stupid people. Most of them are suspicious as hell, and hate anything that even smells like a cop. Then you climb down the dingy stairs and try again.

Some of the photographers kept files and some didn't bother. Some made extra prints and filed them and others kept only the negatives. I got dizzy looking at negatives and there was no way of telling whether I'd missed the man I was looking for. Some of the photographers refused to

take time to show me their files because I didn't know the name of the man I was trying to find. None of them kept their photos filed by dates.

I worked all morning, took time out to lunch on an olive and a martini, and started again in the afternoon. By four I was way out in the sticks and I'd checked off every photographer on the yellow sheet. I stopped at the only bar in the neighborhood and had a shot and a glass of beer.

I was beat. I was groggy from lack of sleep. If it hadn't been for the blonde I'd have given up hours before. I thought of phoning the FBI and decided that it would only take me out of circulation. I had another drink.

In the back of my mind an idea was hatching. I had a third shot to help it along. Suddenly it blossomed. Whoever had followed me down to Panama had made reservations on the following plane. The airport would have the passenger manifest—if I checked with them I could get a list of names to start with. The photographers who filed their pictures at all filed them by name. I went to the pay phone in the back of the bar and called the airport. I told them I was a daily newspaper's social editor, and asked for their list of passengers to Panama for Wednesday. There was a pause on the other end of the line. Then I heard the rustle of paper. An efficient female voice started reading the names:

"Mr. Crowe, Mrs. Crowe, Mr. Carstairs, Mr. Lampert. . . ." I poised my pencil. Mr. Lampert . . . Mr. Lampert. . . . It was the name that they'd paged at the Panama Terminal.

Mr. Lampert had gone down on the plane after me and made a reservation for the plane coming back that evening. Mr. Lampert had been planning on a short stay in Panama. I had a feeling that if I found Mr. Lampert's passport photo, I'd recognize it.

"Thanks," I said hurriedly and hung up. I got change at the bar and started phoning the photographers who'd been too busy to show me through their files, this time asking for the picture by name. The last one I called was irritated.

"Look, Mac," he said. "Like I told you this afternoon, I'm too busy I should have time to play games. What was the name?"

"Lampert."

I heard him going through his files. "Yeah, I got him. He was in here Tuesday, it says."

"What did he look like?"

"How the hell should I know? Thousands of people come in here every year. I should remember what he looked like?"

"Well, you got his pictures right there."

"Look, Mac. I got news. All my pictures look the same. Why do you think I'm a passport photographer?"

"I'll be right down."

I climbed three dim flights of stairs into the grimy studio. The photographer, a bitter little guy with a green visor over his eyes, walked out of his darkroom.

"Oh," he said. "It's you." He went to his desk and rummaged around. He handed me a picture, postage-stamp size. I moved under the skylight and examined it. My heart raced. As he'd said, it was a poor picture—it could have been almost anybody. But it wasn't.

It was Sweet-Boy Hines.

WHEN I gave the guy a buck out of exuberance, he said: "Don't strain yourself, buddy." I raced down the stairs two at a time and out into the street. I took a cab to my car and drove to the Moonbeam Club. On the way, I did a lot of thinking.

Once again, it looked as if Populo was at the bottom of the killing. Sweet-Boy worked for Populo, and he would have been the logical man for Populo to send to Panama. Maybe the killing and the kidnapping weren't connected. But I knew that they were. And I was sure that Populo wouldn't throw away his chances for the Moonbeam Club by kidnapping Cindy. Well, who had sent Sweet-Boy down south?

I remembered the night before. Myself at the phone, and Sweet-Boy at the window. "Boss, there's somebody out there in the bushes." And Sweet-Boy, the bodyguard, had stepped politely aside while his boss rushed to the window. Too, Sweet-Boy had been driving Ace Forrest when he was killed.

It looked as if Populo was getting the double-cross, with whipped cream on top. Also it looked as if I was going to have to take a chance on an ally I didn't particu-

larly trust. But it was my only chance. . . .

I passed a sign that said: *MOONBEAM CLUB—Dine and Dance—3 Miles*. I pulled into a roadside restaurant and went to the phone. I called the club and asked for Populo. After a long wait he came on the line.

"Manager, Moonbeam Club."

"Populo? Blair."

"Yeah," he said cautiously. "What do you want?"

"Is Sweet-Boy there?"

"Maybe."

"Look. I think he's the guy that pulled the Panama job."

"Wait." I heard him tell Sweet-Boy to go to the bar and get him a drink. "OK. Go on."

"He had a passport picture taken Tuesday. Did you see him Wednesday?"

Populo spoke thoughtfully. "I gave him Wednesday to Saturday off—he had to go to L.A. on personal business."

"Yeah. Personal business. He's working for whoever tried to knock you off last night, Populo, sure as hell."

He thought that one over. "You mean he called me to the window last night so they could— Why that dirty—"

"Take it easy. If you want my help, you're going to have to cooperate."

There was a pause. "What's your proposition?"

"Frankly, I don't give a damn about you—I want to find Cindy Forrest. You claim you do too. OK. What kind of a car does Sweet-Boy drive?"

"A blue convertible. Can't miss it. The top's down today."

"Call me here when he leaves for town." I gave him the number and hung up.

I had a cup of coffee and shot the breeze with the waitress to quiet my nerves. I smoked a cigarette and played the juke box and wondered whether Populo was going to play ball. The phone rang and I beat the waitress to it.

"Blair?"

"Yeah."

"OK. He just left." There was a click in my ear. I raced for my car.

The convertible loomed over the hill, making knots. I waited until it was past and then tried to keep it in sight. I caught up with it at a stop light and almost lost it again in the downtown traffic. Finally it

pulled up in front of a brownstone house.

I drove around the block and parked on a side street. I walked past the brownstone house, casing the place. There was a tradesman's entrance and an alley leading into it. I stepped into the alley and waited. No one followed me. I looked up.

A fire-escape dangled temptingly six feet over my head. I inspected the alley. There was a garbage can awaiting the collector. I lifted it and set it down underneath the fire-escape. I hoisted myself up. Quietly I climbed to the first floor and looked in the window.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Cold Deck

THE room was apparently the dining room, dark and wood-paneled. In the room were three men, two sitting with their backs to the window, and Sweet-Boy standing, facing them. He seemed to be objecting to something. Finally the larger of the men stood up, stepped over to Sweet-Boy, and caught him across the mouth with the back of his hand.

Sweet-Boy looked as if his feelings were hurt. The other man peeled a few bills off a roll and tossed them on the table. Sweet-Boy picked them up quickly and stuffed them into his wallet. I took a good look at the faces, so I'd remember them if they broke for cover, and slipped the gun out of my holster. I smashed the window and poked the muzzle in.

"Nobody move." They froze like statues. I reached in with my left hand and unlatched the window. I raised it and followed my gun into the room.

They lined up and I frisked them carefully, tossing their guns on the table. "Now, turn around."

They turned around. It wasn't hard to spot the brains of the outfit. The other guy had the stupid expression of the average mobster, but the man who'd paid off Sweet-Boy had sharp blue eyes.

"Listen," he said. "You're not a cop. What's your racket?"

"My racket is my own business. Where's Cindy Forrest?"

Blue-eyes smiled. "That's our business."

I stepped up to him and clipped him

across the mouth, easy. A trickle of blood ran down his chin.

"Whose business?"

He didn't answer.

"Where's Cindy Forrest?"

He shrugged. "Across the Bay."

That was all I wanted to know. If Blue-eyes said she was across the Bay, then she was on this side of the Bay. If she was on this side, she was probably in the house.

All right. Blue-eyes was smart. So he was smart. Was he tough? I decided to find out. I knocked him to the floor.

He wasn't tough.

"Take him up, Mac," he moaned.

"All of us," I said. "All of us."

Blue-eyes struggled to his feet. We filed out of the room. As we passed through the hallway, I spotted another hood dozing in the parlor. I halted the platoon and collected him. It was too simple. We resumed our march up the stairs. At the top Mac stopped outside a door and knocked. The door opened and a hard-eyed kid of maybe twenty stood in the doorway.

"Suppose you let us in," I suggested. He glanced at me and went for his gun. I jammed the automatic into his ribs and he stopped. "Toss it on the floor," I said pleasantly. "You're too young to die." He threw the gun on the floor.

Sitting on a straight-backed chair was Cindy, not tied up, very glad to see me.

We followed the boys down the stairs, and I herded them into Sweet-Boy's convertible, to the great delight of a gang of neighborhood kids. I crammed four of them in front; Cindy, the young punk and myself in the back.

VINCE POPULO took one look at the crowd I drove into his office, stared, and started pushing buttons. He didn't relax until his own boys started filling up the room. Then he sat back and smiled at Blue Eyes.

"Well," he said. "King Kelly. Who'd have dreamed you'd come way out here. Did New York get too hot for you?"

"Look, Vince," Blue-eyes began.

"Shut up!" Kelly shut up.

Populo turned to Sweet-Boy. "You," he said pleasantly. "You know what's going to happen to you."

*(Please continue on page 97)*

# BEDSIDE MURDER



By **DON  
JAMES**

**T**HE clinic was one of those new, modern, one-story affairs built like a deluxe motel. It was brick, neatly surrounded by narrow lawn, and each doctor had his own entrance with his name outlined in bronze on a sedate plaque.

The plaque hanging by the door I entered read Horace T. Jiller, M.D. I wondered what he wanted. Once in a blue moon someone called and asked me to sell

Through blurring eyes I  
saw him poise the needle  
above a vein. . . .

*Ex-dick Ridley had one chance in a  
hundred against the ruthless slayer—  
whose hand had never lost its kill.*

them some life insurance. As I identified myself to the dark-eyed receptionist, I had visions of \$50,000 policies and healthy commissions.

"George Ridley," I said. "Dr. Jiller asked me to call."

The girl smiled and consulted her appointment book. "Oh, yes. The doctor is busy at the moment. Do you mind waiting?"

I assured her I wouldn't and selected a magazine from a table and sat down. I thumbed through the pages and waited. Three patients also waited and eyed me with suspicion. I hoped I'd get in before they did. Maybe I would—he'd sent for me. I hadn't asked him for an appointment.

A middle-aged matron came out of the doctor's office and departed. All of us looked at the receptionist. She smiled again and said,

"Mr. Ridley, please."

I replaced the magazine, ignored the looks the patients were giving me, and went in to see the doctor.

He was young, tall, and handsome, and I suspected that his bedside manner was as effective as the sedatives he prescribed. He got up from behind a small desk to shake hands with me. I decided that a \$50,000 policy was not too ambitious.

"This is rather unusual, Mr. Ridley," he assured me. "Ordinarily I wouldn't pursue such techniques, but in this case I believe it's justified." He motioned toward a chair. I settled myself in it, wondering why buying insurance was unusual or a technique. He was talking like one of my clients might have talked three years ago when I'd had the detective agency; before I'd become an insurance salesman when I lost my license.

"Yes?" I prompted him.

"I hope you won't take this the wrong way; that you'll understand I'm following the dictates of my judgement as an objective professional man."

I nodded and waited.

"It's your divorced wife, Mr. Ridley. I want to talk with you about her."

Mentally I filed away all the insurance plans I had ready for presentation. I stood, picked up my hat, smiled pleasantly and said, "It's been nice meeting you, doctor."

He looked up at me with calm eyes. "You're sure?"

"There are two closed chapters in my life, doctor. One is the license to practice as a private detective. I lost it. The second is Alice Ridley. I understand she kept my name. Of the two I regret the lost license the more."

"I'm sorry. I think you could help her."

"That, Dr. Jiller, is a laugh. That girl doesn't need anyone's help. Believe me!"

"Do you know she's in a hospital? Very ill?"

I looked up at him and thought about Alice being seriously ill. Suddenly I realized that there's a difference between despising a healthy person and an ill one. Illness strips individualities to essentials. It creates new values. They may be temporary and colored by a strange complex of sympathy and memories and even emotions. At that moment I remembered the time I'd had pneumonia and Alice had sat up with me three nights. That was the first year; before things went to hell.

"I didn't know," I said. "What's wrong with her?"

He straightened a prescription pad on his desk and thoughtfully considered it a few seconds before he looked up at me again.

"What would ordinarily be a lethal dose of sleeping pills. Fortunately the girl who shares an apartment with her came home early from a date and found her in time. She called me at once."

"Attempted suicide?" I asked. I didn't like the sound of the words, nor what they might imply. Things were getting a little mixed up for me.

Dr. Jiller shrugged. "She might tell you. At any rate, she has asked me to get you. She wants to talk with you. I don't know what about. I have the feeling that she'll rest easier if you'll see her."

I lit a cigarette. "That doesn't sound like Alice. She's always been too sure of what she wants. Ruthless as hell. I can't imagine her taking a dutch."

The doctor glanced at his wristwatch and rose. "Will you see her?"

Maybe I felt that I had to repay those three nights. My conscience and my hates seem to conflict occasionally.

"Okay. What hospital?"

He told me and I went out.

I HADN'T seen her for over two years. Her hair still was deep copper. Her eyes looked too large for her pale face. Her smile looked tired. I didn't take the soft, white hand she held out.

"Still hate me?" she said.

"We went through all of that three years ago. Let's not warm it over, Alice."

She looked me over. "The thirties are good to you. You're a little heavier, but nicely so. A few more pounds look good on your six feet."

"Skip it. The doctor said you wanted to talk with me."

"Why did you come, George?"

"He said you're really ill. You sat up three nights with me once."

"So you thought you owed me something for that?"

I shrugged.

She said, "You're tough, hard and smart. And underneath you've a soft streak. Sir Galahad in a business suit. How's the insurance business?"

"What do you want, Alice?"

Suddenly she looked very tired. It awakened no pity in me. No sympathy. Nothing. The fire was out and she was a woman in a hospital bed.

"They paroled Tom Kosset for good behavior last week. He's out."

Tough, hard and smart? Maybe...but a cold chill quivered up my spine. I said, "Oh, I see." I sat in the chair by her bed and we looked at one another. This was probably the only mutual thing we had left.

They'd let us see him for a few moments before they took him away. His eyes betrayed his hate. Hysterical anger can die and disappear. Tom's wasn't that kind. His voice was too low and clear for hysterical anger.

*"If it's the last thing I ever do—and it may be the last thing—I'm going to kill both of you when I get out."*

The firm's name had been Ridley and Kosset and at that time Alice was Alice Morgan and the firm's receptionist, typist, and office force. She also had been wearing Tom Kosset's ring.

The whole thing blew up overnight. Our fattest account was Geminsco. Most of our work was going after stolen jewel-

ry, and an occasional protection job. We cracked the nut for the business with their retainer fee. We picked up the gravy on the usual run of jobs an agency gets.

Then a smart lieutenant of detectives named Nat Gronzel discovered that slim, smooth, smart Tom Kosset was holding hands with a small gang of heist boys who were getting away with a surprising number of jewels, insured by Geminsco.

It was a nice racket. Kosset gave what aid he could in casing and fingering the loot for his pals. Then he made a minor hero of himself by locating it and buying it back for the insurance company. It can be cheaper for a company to buy back loot than to pay off on a policy sometimes. It was for Geminsco, and Lieutenant Gronzel discovered that Tom was taking his share of the pay-off.

Gronzel believed Alice and me when we told him we didn't know what was going on. Not because he had big blue eyes and a trusting soul, but because his own investigations had convinced him that we were in the clear.

There was an unpleasant scene with Tom. Some unpleasant words and Alice slapped him after she returned his ring. Then Gronzel had to step between us when Tom and I had our conversation.

Alice and I gave the D. A. all the information we could. We were able to verify some dates and times and places. It was enough to send Tom over the road. The name of the firm had been plastered over the front pages so much that a hard-boiled police commissioner did the obvious thing. He cancelled my license with Tom's.

A few months after Tom had gone up the river, I broke down and let Alice know that I'd had a special yen for her while she was wearing Tom's ring. That was the way I felt about it. The real thing. Love, kisses, and romance. Alice said she'd felt that way, too. We were married.

We had one carefully written letter from Tom. He said he'd suspected it all along. That was why we had been so willing to testify against him. He built it up. It must have been distorted and hot as molten lead in his mind while he brooded about it behind bars.

Five months later I came home from an out-of-town trip and a man named Dave Harney, who played a little in the

rackets, didn't get out the back door in time. I broke my fist on his jaw. I moved out that same night. The divorce was granted three months later.

Now I sat beside a hospital bed and looked at Alice while we both thought about Tom Kosset and remembered his unreasonable temper, his distorted ideas about things, his native cunning and his ruthlessness. I'd taken him as a partner not because I liked him, but because he was good at his job. Ruthlessly good, and hard. It had paid off until he became as crooked as the men he sought.

"So he's out," I finally said.

She shut her eyes and nodded. "I'm scared to death, George."

"There's only one way to handle this. I'm going to the cops and tell them what he threatened. Tell them that we're worried."

She opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling. "I did that. I went to the D.A. He smiled indulgently and assured me I was mistaken. It seems that Tom went to them and told them he'd lost his head and made wild threats. How much he regretted it. That he saw what a fool he had been and he wants to pay off his debt to society by leading a solid citizen's life from now on. He really sold them a bill of goods. They swallowed it."

"Did you talk with Gronzel?"

"Gronzel overstepped some political fences a year or so ago. I talked with him and he looked worried, but he said he couldn't do anything about it. He's looking for another job. He's tired of driving a prowler car in the sticks. That's where he is and someone else is wearing his leisenancy."

"I didn't know that."

"I don't even feel safe here," she said.

"You're all right here in the hospital." I looked at her closely. "Was that the reason for the pills?"

"I'll tell you about that. I stayed home that night—night before last. I saw the D.A. that day. On the way home I thought I saw Tom following me, but when I tried to be sure I didn't see him again."

"Sally Mell, who shares the apartment with me, went out on a date that night. I got ready for bed and the phone rang. It was Tom. He simply said, 'Remember what I told you and George? Tomorrow

is the day, honey!' Then he hung up."

"So you lost your nerve and took a flock of pills."

SHE turned her head and looked at me, anger momentarily flickering in her eyes, and then fading to bleakness.

"That was just the last straw. I've been having other troubles. I've had enough. When I turned out the lights and thought about dying the next day, or the day after, of having to face that every moment from now on...death that might hurt...agony...well, it just didn't make sense to add that along with everything else. The pills seemed the easier way at the moment."

"What other troubles?"

"Nothing that concerns you. You're not interested. I picked the road—you didn't pick it for me. If it's been rough, that's my bad luck. I've never blamed you for my being a fool."

I didn't say anything.

"Anyhow—" she looked back at the ceiling again—"I thought I ought to tell you about Tom—in case you hadn't heard. You can take care of yourself even if I can't take care of myself."

I lit cigarettes for us and forced a thin smile. "Stop worrying about him. I'll handle it."

"At the agency he was always a little smarter than you, George."

"That's what I've heard."

"But you had more stubborn toughness. Maybe that will pay off for you now."

"Maybe."

"Thanks for coming to see me."

I took her hand for a moment and pressed the white fingers. I'd have done as much for anyone in any ward if pressing a hand looked as if it might help.

"Good night, George."

"Go to sleep and forget Tom," I said.

She smiled at the ceiling. "You deserved better," she said.

I'd thought that myself. I didn't tell her so. I just got up and left.

I'd arrived late in the evening and I'd stayed after visiting hours. Nurses were busy giving backrubs and preparing patients for sleep. I looked down the long hallway and realized that Alice's room was on the ground floor. It was a hot night and a curtain rustled lazily by an open window at the end of the hallway.



"Don't get the jitters," I told myself. "You're imagining things. He wouldn't try anything here."

That open window bothered me, though. Kosset was smart enough to find out where she was. I was willing to bet 100 to 1 that he knew she was in the hospital and what had happened. Knowing him as I did, I would also bet he'd rather do the job of ending her life than letting her do it by her own hand.

Several orderlies were in the hallway and there was general activity around the counter at the main entrance. She probably was safe enough.

I had my job cut out. Somewhere in the city was Tom Kosset and I had to find him before he found me. I wasn't sure what I would do when I found him, but at the bottom of a drawer in my room was the Police Positive I had worn. I would wear it again.

I smiled at the nurse on duty at the desk and went out into the summer night. It was moonless and the heat held to the night with relentless intensity.

I walked toward the parking lot and looked back at the hospital. Dense shrubbery concealed the lower floor at the end of the building and I remembered the open window. A man could easily...

*Forget it. She's safe.* I tried to shake the worry from my mind.

It wasn't until I'd driven through a red light that I pulled to the curb and stopped. I lit a cigarette and let the nagging worry of the open window come into bloom again. It had been bothering me for blocks.

I remembered what Alice had said, "You deserved better." I wondered if she didn't deserve better. Every protection I could give her.

*Hell! It isn't a matter of marriage, divorce, or anything but being a human being, I thought. She's one. You wouldn't tie up a pup in the open with a wildcat prowling the neighborhood!*

I swung the car around and headed back toward the hospital.

No one was at the desk when I went in. I wasn't sure what I would have said if someone had been there. For a moment I thought of going to the end of the hallway and closing and locking the window. In the heat someone would open it again.

The hallway was darkened to a half light and the activity had disappeared. Night nurses were settling down to their duties. A special nurse came out of a room and hurried past me.

Down the hallway toward Alice's room an orderly came out of a dispensary room carrying a tray. I reached in a pocket and brought out a ten-dollar bill.

I hurried to catch him and called softly. He stopped and I came up behind him.

"I want you to watch a room for me tonight. It's worth ten bucks to you if—"

HE TURNED and I stared at him. Then at the hand that wasn't holding the tray. The hand he had slipped into a white coat pocket and brought up quickly. There was a gun in the hand and Tom Kosset's face had a grim smile.

"Hello, George."

I tensed and he shook his head. "Don't," he said.

I relaxed. As long as I was alive there was a chance to help Alice. There was nothing to be gained by inviting a lead slug now. He'd be out of the place before the echo of a shot had died.

"Let's go to her room," he said.

He waited until I was in front of him and we walked a few steps to the door. He prodded me. I opened the door and went in. I glanced quickly at the bed. Alice was sleeping, one hand curled by her cheek. Suddenly I remembered how many times I had seen her like that.

She awakened and her eyes turned to us. She opened her mouth to scream.

"Don't!" I said sharply. I felt the urgent need for time. Anything to slow Tom—to drag it out. A scream would have brought shots.

She held her breath. Fear widened her eyes and she half sat up in the bed.

"Smart girl," Tom said. He prodded me to the chair beside the bed and put the tray down on the stand. I saw the hypodermic needle on it.

"How do I look as an orderly, folks?" He smiled. "They sell these uniforms downtown. I came in this afternoon and cased the joint and saw what the well-dressed orderly is wearing. The rest was easy."

"Tom, you're making a mistake," I said. "You've got a chance to get out of

here. We'll promise to forget all this."

His lips tightened. "I owe you for three years in a cell. For three years out of my life. You could have kept your damned mouths shut. Both of you." His eyes narrowed and the cold, ruthless light was in them again. "She's the one woman I loved. You fixed that fine, George. Fine! And she played me for a sucker."

"You're crazy! We didn't—"

He smiled again. "You didn't know it all. I've had to sweat it out three years—for months—almost two thousand days and nights. I didn't know when you'd remember. When you'd hook it up and tie it in a package."

"What do you mean?"

"Remember the night Mrs. Vanler was murdered? The night she lost her diamonds? That was before I tied in with the boys. Even Gronzel didn't get that one. Those jewels weren't bought back. It looked like an out-of-town gang. Remember?"

I nodded slowly. It was right after we'd taken the Geminco account.

"You loaned me your gun that day—in the morning," he said. "Alice should remember that, too. Mine was having the sights adjusted. I'd bent one. Remember? And when I gave it back to you a couple of days later you complained because I'd left too much oil on it when I cleaned it. You're particular about guns. But it didn't occur to you that I'd used it. You thought I'd just cleaned it to be doing something."

I remembered. Alice and I exchanged glances.

"Someday," Tom said, "you'd have remembered it. And you'd have wondered because of the other stuff that came out. You could have taken the gun to the cops. They have the bullet that killed Mrs. Vanler. Ballistics would prove it came from your gun."

"You both had alibis. That was the night you and Alice worked with the Geminco adjuster checking cases we'd inherited. And the next day it was his birthday. You told me how he bought drinks after your session. He'll remember, too, and cinch your alibis."

"Then you've had more than we thought to get rid of us," I said.

"That's right."

"You can't get away with it here, Tom.

They'll get you before you're out of the place."

Suddenly his hand darted out and closed on Alice's wrist. "Forget the bell, sweetheart." The button was less than an inch from her fingers. She grimaced in pain. I drew my legs into readiness for a fast spring at Tom.

He slashed down with the gun and caught me across the jaw. I slumped forward and tried to stop the room's dizzy whirl.

"This is how we do it," he said softly. "There's enough morphine in that hypo to kill several redheaded dames. I had a little trouble getting it, but I managed. There's enough to put both of you into that long, long sleep. The one the cops would give me if you ever talked."

"Alice went to the D.A." I mumbled. My words had trouble tracking. I was groggy from the blow. "He'll add it up and—"

"She's in here for an overdose of drugs. I'll take a chance. She'll have a relapse."

"That won't explain me."

"We're on the ground floor. There are shrubs outside the window. I'll dump you out, get you to your car. You'll have an accident out on the highway. They won't bother to make an autopsy. They won't know you're full of morphine."

Alice struggled in his grasp and he turned his attention away from me for a second. His hand clamped over her mouth. After a moment she was quiet. I tried to get up and he slashed with the gun again. I went to the floor.

AFTER years of effort I got to my knees. Alice watched me, her eyes filled with tears above the hand that smothered her mouth. The bell button had been pushed off the other side of the bed out of reach.

Tom looked at me in satisfaction. Carefully he placed the gun on the stand and picked up the hypodermic syringe.

"Ladies first?" He smiled. He hesitated a second. "Maybe I'd better be safe," he murmured. He doubled a fist and chopped it sharply to Alice's jaw. Her head jerked back into the pillow and her eyes closed.

I fumbled for him with leaden arms. He kicked me back and through blurring eyes I saw him turn one of Alice's limp

arms and poise the needle above a vein.

I crawled forward and groped for his ankles. I caught the cuff of a trouser leg and pulled.

He swore and turned. A foot crashed into my face. I clenched my fist into the cuff and rolled.

His fist pounded the back of my neck. I held on. He knelt on me, his knees in my back. A hand grasped my wrist and jerked my arm behind me.

I relaxed. *One chance in a hundred*, I thought numbly. One chance for the tough, stubborn boy named George!

The needle jabbed into my arm and I uncoiled with all my strength. I centered every ounce upon that arm in a sudden jerk. Pain tore it. I heard the snap of the needle. A curse exploded from Tom.

I threshed wildly. He couldn't use the needle on Alice. If I was lucky I'd broke it off in my arm before he'd shot much of the drug into me. Alice screamed.

Tom tore away from me and clawed over Alice toward the window. I tried to get up and staggered to the floor again.

Screams filled the room and there was a struggle on the bed as Tom got over it and pulled at the window.

Maybe it was the morphine. Maybe it was the blows from the gun. Things were fogging. I clutched at the foot of the bed and pulled myself up. The bed stand was there. It was at my fingertips and I couldn't reach it. Everything was slowing down for me.

"Be tough," I thought. "She said stubborn and tough."

Vaguely I knew the window was up. Tom had whirled and was lifting a hand. I saw the glint of knife steel. He'd taken precious seconds for this.

Outside in the hallway voices sounded. A nurse said, "Which room?"

Tom's eyes were on Alice and I saw the whiteness around the intense pupils. *Killer's eyes . . . killer's eyes . . .* The phrase came from nowhere in dazed monotony.

"You double-crosser!" Tom's voice was vitrol. The knife lifted another inch and I saw the contraction of his shoulder muscles as he prepared to plunge it down.

My hand was numb but the gun was in it. I forced it toward Tom. I saw the

broken needle and blood, the wrist, the hand and the gun in it. A hand that was asleep and numb—useless. I clamped my other hand to it and sought the trigger.

The gun flew from my hand with the explosion. Tom crashed back against the window frame. We stared at one another for an instant. A dark, liquid blotch smeared his throat. I watched him slide out of sight between the bed and the window.

Then the room began to darken and I stared at the broken needle in my arm until the light was gone in darkness.

\* \* \*

Dr. Jiller inspected the small wound in my arm, looked at the cut over an eye, and contemplated the bruises on my face.

"You can leave tomorrow," he smiled. "He gave you enough morphine to keep you asleep for twelve hours."

"Thanks, Doc."

He glanced toward the door. "Stand some company?"

"Is she all right?"

"Fine."

He stepped away and Alice came in.

"You're very tough and hard and stubborn." She smiled.

"That's what you said before." I waved a hand at the doctor and watched him leave. Alice stood at the bed and looked down at me.

"How do I say it, George? Just—thanks?"

"It isn't necessary. I was in the act as much as you were."

She shook her head. "I'd rather thank you this way." She leaned over me and I caught the familiar smell of her perfume and hair. Then I felt the softness of her lips. It had been a long time. . . .

After she had straightened and was looking down at me again, I stared at the ceiling and thought about it.

"Tough, hard, stubborn—with a soft streak," she said.

"Not soft enough, Alice."

She was quiet and when I looked at her I saw the tears. "That's what I thought," she said quietly. "Thanks and good-by."

I didn't say anything. Her heels made a familiar, small clicking sound as she walked down the hallway.

THE END

# A CORPSE

*From her prison nightmare into a living hell walked Eileen—  
as hostage for the stolen gems which weren't there.*



# ON ME!

**Dynamic Novelette of a Blonde Jailwren**

**By JOHN D.**

**MacDONALD**

"One more dead one  
isn't going to make a bit  
of difference."



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Bring Her Back—Alive**

**A**T FOUR o'clock on that long-awaited October afternoon, Brendan Mahar saw her walking down the sidewalk on the other side of the street, the suitcase dragging her shoulder down. Rain was a perpetual dreary mist, fattening to ripe drops on the dying leaves, darkening the gray stone wall that bor-

dered the sidewalk, turning the litter of papers and leaves in the gutter to paste.

There was an automaton quality about her walk and, even at a hundred feet, he sensed the expressionlessness of her face. She was hatless, her pale hair drawn tightly back.

He left the warmth of the car and stood, waiting for a coal truck to rumble by before crossing over to wait for her. She walked, watching the sidewalk a few feet in front of her. She did not look up until

he stood squarely in her path. He caught a quick impression of gray-green elongated eyes, totally without expression, before she looked away. She tried to walk around him. He moved over and reached for the suitcase.

"Let me by."

"I've been waiting for you, Eileen."

Again she tried to get by. He pulled the suitcase out of her hand. She tugged at it, then gave up and stood woodenly.

"What do you want?" Her voice was low and spiritless.

"I want to help."

"I don't want help."

"Betty Krastnov said you would need help."

She gave him a startled look, her eyes widening for a moment. The scar was puckered and ugly, starting at the right corner of her mouth, slanting down toward the clear angle of the jawbone.

"Please leave me alone," she said.

"My car's right over there. Come on." He started toward the car, carrying her suitcase. At the curb, he turned.

She gave a small shrug and followed him. He put the suitcase in the back seat, held the door for her, closed it on her and went around and got behind the wheel. Silver beads of rain were caught in her pale hair. She sat and stared straight ahead, her hands lax in her lap. He saw the cracked, chipped fingernails, the bloated puffiness of the backs of her hands, the result of work in the laundry. Her skin had the unhealthy pallor of a starchy diet. The outmoded dress and coat were of cheap stuff.

"Where were you going?" he asked.

"They . . . gave me a bus ticket and they said the station was down this street."

"Do you have any money?"

"They gave me five dollars." She touched the cracked patent-leather purse.

"You have plans?"

"Only to get away from here."

He started the car. The wipers clicked slowly back and forth. He went down three blocks to the tracks, waited for the light, and turned right on the four-lane highway leading to the city, sixty miles away. He glanced over at her. She stared straight ahead. From that angle the scar did not show. Her profile was clear and

good—but there was a quality about her expression that he had often noticed in newspaper photographs of accident victims. It was as though she had died—quite violently and quite some time ago. She asked no questions.

Brendan Mahar began to talk. Not of her. Fragments of the news. The new car he was considering buying . . . how hot the summer had been . . . a new TV show. He watched her whenever the traffic gave him a chance, saw that she seemed insulated from his conversation, from the world that spun wetly by outside. When he asked her a direct question, she would answer with one expressionless monosyllable.

"Betty Krastnov is making out all right."

No answer.

"Did you know that she married her Carl?"

"No."

"They have a place the other side of town. Carl is driving a big rig for Landray Brothers. Betty is raising chickens on their land. She says they're the stupidest, dirtiest, dyingest chickens in the state." He laughed softly.

She did not smile.

"My name is Brendan Mahar, Eileen."

She did not answer.

He sighed inwardly, gave up the effort. The car, in overdrive, sighed along at an effortless sixty-five.

"Hungry?"

"No, thank you."

They reached the city during the evening traffic jam. He concentrated on making time until they were two blocks from the Hotel Durand. He said casually, "I took the liberty of getting you a room at the Hotel Durand, Eileen. This would be a pretty poor time to have to look for a place to stay."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw her turn quickly and look at him. "Why are you doing all this?"

"Any friend of Betty's . . ."

"I hardly know her. Why are you doing all this?"

The hotel was just ahead. He swung in to the curb. "Don't ask questions now. We'll talk later. Just take it as it comes."

The doorman opened the car door. A bellhop took the bag out of the back.

"Four-eighteen," Brendan said. "Please get the key at the desk."

It was a small suite with sitting room, bedroom and bath. The purchases he had made previously were piled, still wrapped, on one of the chairs. He gave the bellhop a half dollar, turned and saw her standing quietly, her arms at her sides, staring at the rug halfway between them.

He rubbed his hands together and said with forced joviality: "Nice to get in out of the rain, eh?"

"Is this your room, mister?"

"My name is Brendan—Bren to my friends—and this is completely and exclusively your room, Eileen. I have a room in the hotel. On the tenth floor."

He went over to the pile of packages, snapped the string on a box and said, without turning, "Betty said she was pretty certain about sizes. I'm anxious to see how she did."

The first dress was a misty green, very close to the shade of her eyes. He held it up. "Think it will fit?"

"I guess so."

He laid it across the back of the chair. He opened the other boxes, said with sudden irritation, "At least, Eileen, you could be taking this stuff into the bedroom and hanging it up."

She obeyed immediately. He carried the cosmetics he had bought her in and laid out the bottles and jars on the top of the dressing table. She did not watch him.

"Doesn't this stuff mean anything to you, Eileen?"

"It's nice," she said. Her voice was gray lead.

He stared at her in exasperation. "Okay, Eileen. All you seem to do is follow orders." He faced her with his hands on his hips.

"Now listen to me. Scrub the prison smell off yourself. I'll be in the sitting room. Put on the new things. Brush your hair and paint your nails and put on some makeup, damn it. Then come out when you're ready. Is that clear?"

She nodded.

**H**E WALKED out and slammed the door. The lock clicked softly. He stood and glared down at the dusk traffic, a wide, heavy-boned man in his early

thirties, with a pleasant ugly face, bitterness around his mouth, black hair cropped so short that it fitted his broad skull like a knit cap.

The muted roar of the water stopped. He went over to the phone, gave the number, lit a cigarette as he waited.

"Betty? This is Bren."

"You've got her with you? How is she?"

"I'm damned if I know. She's a zombie. The walking dead. She's said ten words since I picked her up. She acts like she'd been gutted like a fresh-caught fish. The stuff we bought made as much impression as handing a dollar bill to a statue in the park."

"I told you how it would be, Bren."

"I guess I didn't listen so good. I get the feeling that if I told her to jump out the window, she'd start climbing over the sill."

"In four years you can get pretty used to following orders. Be good to her, Bren. Don't be impatient. Don't try to go too fast."

"When'll you be down?"

"Noon tomorrow all right?"

"Fine."

"She's had it rough, Bren. I know. And I only did eighteen months. I'm not over it yet. I get all moody and Carl has to slap me out of it. Be good to her."

"Okay. See you tomorrow, Betty."

He left the door unlatched, went up to his own room and came back with the bottle of brandy. He ordered ice, soda and glasses. He made himself a light drink, sipped it slowly. The traffic rush was gone and night was in the city. The rain had stopped, but the streets still glistened. Neon had a hard brilliance.

The lock made a tiny sound. He sat where he was. She stood in the doorway. The bath had put color in her face. Her hair was no longer pulled tightly back and he saw that she had brushed life into it. It waved softly, and picked up the lamp glow. The pale blue terrycloth robe reached to within an inch of the floor and it was belted tightly around her slim waist. For the first time he realized how lovely she must have been four years before. For a moment he thought she had come to life—and then he saw the dead eyes.



"Sit down, Eileen. Brandy?"

"No."

He poured a stiff drink into the other glass, added ice and a bit of soda. He took it over to her. "Drink this."

She lifted it to her lips, drank until it was gone and set the glass aside. She coughed and shuddered.

"Now then. How does a steak sound?"

"I don't care."

"Rather have something else?"

She didn't answer. He picked up the phone and ordered dinner. Two tenderloins medium rare, peas, shoestring potatoes, tossed green salad, coffee.

He tried to talk to her before the waiter came with the cart. She was as quiet as before. He signed the check, told the waiter he'd push the cart into the hall when they were through, gave him his tip.

They ate in silence. At first she displayed no interest in the food, and then she began to eat with precise gestures, never taking her eyes from her plate. He finished first, lit a cigarette over his coffee, watched her bowed shining head. The scar distorted the corner of her mouth. When she finished, she laid the knife and fork across the plate and kept her head bowed. He held the cigarettes over to her. She hesitated and then took one. She glanced into his eyes and then away very quickly, as he lighted it for her.

"Sit over there, Eileen, and I'll get this stuff out of the way."

"I'll do it, Mr. Mahar."

"Never mind."

He wheeled the cart into the hall. The only light in the room was from the small lamp on the end table beside the divan. She stood looking out the window, her back to him. He sat on the divan and said, his voice gentle, "Tomorrow we'll make an appointment with a good plastic surgeon named Schribe. It'll be no trick for him to fix your mouth."

She turned toward him and lifted her hand, her fingertips touching the scar. Her voice was thin and high. "She did it to me. In the yard. We were all exercising. She didn't like me. And then in the hospital they put clamps in it and they said that they wanted it to heal right, but it wasn't their business to give beauty treatments."

She covered her eyes with the heels of her hands, her fingernails digging into her forehead just below the hairline. He went quickly to her as she swayed. He led her to the divan. He sat beside her, his arm around her shoulders.

She tried to pull away from him.

"Tears are good," he said. "Let 'em come."

It began as though she had forgotten how to cry. The sobs were harsh and solid objects that tore through her throat. He pulled her over so that her face was against the hollow of his neck and shoulder, her forehead hard against his jaw.

Tears for the lost years, for the gray denim, the shuffling lines, the cruel stone, the clang of steel, the greedy silence of the dining hall. She cried herself into exhaustion. The sobs came at greater intervals. A sigh was deep inside her and suddenly and surprisingly she smiled. A shy, warm smile.

"I'm sorry." The smile faded and her mouth twisted unpleasantly. "But maybe people like me shouldn't have feelings."

He took her shoulders and shook her gently. "That would be fine, wouldn't it? Just dandy! Nice proof that they broke every last bit of spirit in you. Eileen, a lot of nice people do time. And I think you're nice people. Now I'm leaving. You get some rest. I'll arrange to have them call you at eleven in the morning."

On impulse he bent over her and kissed her forehead. At the doorway, he clicked the switch and said, "Good night, Eileen."

"Good night . . . Bren."

OUT in the corridor he tested her door, took the elevator down to the lobby. It was a little after ten. Cam Stoddard had said he would be right over. Bren was waiting in the dark bar when Cam arrived. They picked a table in a quiet corner and Brendan carried his drink over.

Cam Stoddard had a long, turkey-red face. He looked as though a tailoring firm, on a bet, had tried to dress a typical farmer so that he'd look like a bond salesman. But nothing could disguise the blond cowlick, the weather wrinkles at the corners of his pale blue eyes, the big-knuckled hands.

"How's the uncaged canary?" Cam

asked, a smile creasing his features.

"Not ready to sing. Not by a damn sight. I just tucked her in before I phoned you."

"With a good night kiss?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact. On the forehead."

"Better leave that out of your report. Harrison is not noted for having a sense of humor. Is she a pretty rough type?"

"No. The Krastnov woman was right, Cam. I suppose women's prisons all over the country are full of them. Sensitive kids who grow up in the wrong neighborhood, too innocent to see what's going on right under their noses, then getting mixed up in something pretty shoddy. They get chapped into prison before they find out what the world is all about."

Cam grinned. "If you're through with the philosophy and sociology, we'll get practical. Why they picked an ugly specimen like you, I'll never know."

"Pure charm. But you wouldn't understand."

"Okay, okay. What's the decision?"

"Based on the way it looks, I'd say right now we'll get further by getting on her side of the fence. She's pretty bitter. If she finds out we're law and order, she'll spit in my eye. We'll have to make it on the basis of cooperation. Seems a shame, but the job comes first—and so does the recovery fee. I can't take any chances on that. Will you coach Betty Krastnov tonight?"

"She said she wouldn't like it if we decided to do it this way."

"But she promised to play along. She wants hubby to own his own rig. Betty will be at the hotel at noon. We'll have the meeting at Eileen's room. You can arrive with Betty. Follow her on up in about three minutes so it won't look as though you came with her. Follow my lead on the conversation."

Cam sighed. "I keep having shortness of breath, pardner. One million dollars worth of ice at twenty percent. One hundred thousand for the agency, forty thousand apiece for you and me and twenty for Krastnov. Yum!"

"Life can be very disappointing, friend. Wait until we get our hands on it. . . ."

His phone rang. He shrugged off sleep and looked at his watch as he reached

for the hand-set. Eight-thirty. Morning.

"Hello, Mr. Mahar? This is Eileen Kraft. I . . . I guess I'm used to getting up early. Did I wake you up?"

"No. No. What is it?"

"I don't want to bother you, Mr. Mahar. I've been trying for a half hour to get up the courage to go downstairs and eat. But I can't seem to do it. If you could come and get me. . . . I have money enough for breakfast, and—"

He smiled. "Sit tight, honey. Give me time to finish my shower and dress. Say fifteen minutes. Okay?"

"I'll wait for you."

He was singing off-key in the shower—when he thought again of what they had to do. It took the music out of him.

He knocked and she opened the door. He whistled softly. "What do you know?"

She was shy. "It's a very nice dress."

"On a very nice gal. Let's eat."

After they ordered, down in the grill room, she said, "Thanks for helping me, Bren. I had no idea about what I was going to do. . . . Now I want to go on living."

"Glad to hear it," he said heartily. "World's a nice place when the coffee's good."

"You were understanding. You let me cry some of it out."

"Maybe you could talk out some more of it. I listen good."

"Not right now."

"Go ahead. How was it in there?"

"Horrible at first. Never a single minute to be alone. Bells ringing and the marching and all those women. There were some nice ones. Betty was nice and one or two others." She glanced at her hands and quickly put them below the edge of the table. She said wistfully, "My hands were real pretty once."

"They will be again."

"Do you really think so?"

"And that scar will be gone and the whole four years will begin to seem like something you dreamed."

"I've got to find something to do. Some kind of work. I'm not trained for anything."

This was as good an opening as any. He was careful not to overdo it. He lowered his voice. "I wouldn't worry about that, kid. We watched you four

years ago. We know it was a bad rap. Hell, they made you pay four years out of your life. Might as well put the cart before the horse and get your own innings. Know what I mean?"

Delicate frown wrinkles appeared between her eyebrows. "Who are you and why are you doing this?"

"I told you yesterday. I'm Brendan Mahar and any friend of Betty's is a friend of mine."

"I don't understand."

"Are you sure? I hope you're not that dumb, Eileen. We're nice people when you get to know us."

He saw her begin to catch on. Her eyes held a frightened look. "But I don't want to have anything to do with—"

"You want to play it alone. Is that it? I don't think you can. It's too big. We've got the organization and besides, you told Betty just enough so that we've gotten pretty eager. You know how it is."

She gave him a long look. "I think I'd like to talk to Betty."

"You will. In your room at noon today. So we'll skip the topic until then. All right?" He gave her his best smile.

"All right, Bren." He saw an unanticipated dimple.

"Long as we're up early, we can check on Schriebe, maybe get a hospital appointment."

"I . . . I can't pay."

"Has anybody mentioned that?"

"No, but—"

"Then why should you mention it? . . ."

Schriebe had been tipped off. He saw her at once, tilted her back in the chair, examined the inside and outside of her mouth with great care. Brendan stood over at one side. Schriebe pinched her cheek along the line of the scar. He grunted and said, "Clumsy job done on you, Miss Kraft. Very clumsy. How old are you?"

"Twenty-five. Nearly twenty-six."

"You should heal quickly. That's a help. You'll be ten days in the hospital."

"Will there be a scar?"

"There might be. Two hair-line scars running parallel to each other. But with makeup even you won't be able to find them." He chuckled. "I may give you even a better mouth than you had before. But it will mean no talking for a week

and all your food through a tube. Mind?"

"I wouldn't mind if it were six months instead of a week."

"When can you go into the hospital, Miss Kraft?"

"How about Monday?" Brendan said. "Four days from today."

"Good. I'll make the arrangements and phone you at your hotel, Miss Kraft. Hotel Durand, isn't it?"

They walked out of his offices. He glanced at her and saw the glow of happiness and excitement in her eyes.

"What now?"

"Bren, I think I'd like to look in store windows. Do you mind?"

"I can meet you back at the hotel."

"No. Stay with me."

"Okay. I may even buy you a lolly-pop."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Crashing the Party

EILEEN answered the door when Betty knocked. Bren watched them meet. Betty was a brunette with a hard, chunky body, a wide friendly face, generous mouth. She moved as though barely able to keep enormous energy under control.

Eileen was shy. Betty kissed her and said, "Oh, honey, honey! How many times I've thought of you in there! What a dirty deal, honey!"

"I don't know how to thank you, Betty. All the things you and Mr. Mahar have done for me. . . ."

"If you got out first and had the cash, you'd have done it for me, no?"

"Of course."

Betty sat down, clicked open her shoulder bag and fished out her cigarettes. With a cigarette in the corner of her mouth, she said, "Bren, honey. How's the room service here?"

He went to the phone. "Manhattans okay?" Betty nodded. He had just hung up when Cam Stoddard knocked on the door. Eileen looked at Cam with a puzzled expression.

Betty said quickly, "This is a business conference, honey. One of our associates, Cam Stoddard. Cam, this is Eileen Kraft."

Cam nodded, his face blank.

The pitcher, circled by glasses, arrived. Bren signed, poured, took the filled glasses around. Betty lifted hers. She gave Bren an odd look, said huskily, "To crime, kids. And to hell with anyone who says it doesn't pay."

Bren watched Eileen. Her face turned a shade paler, but she drank.

"The meeting will come to order," Betty said. "Eileen, we've been waiting for you to get out. I told the boys what you told me that night in the hospital when we had adjoining beds. If you don't mind, I'll go over it once lightly. Boo Renaki picked you up at a dance hall in your own neighborhood. You didn't know what he did for a living. Things were rough at home and you were anxious to get out for good. Boo could put on a good line when he had to. He saw you often and finally talked you into going away with him to be married. You, at that point, were one very dumb kid. You never questioned Boo's never meeting you in public after that first night.

"He taught you to drive a car. The night was set for running away. He gave you a yarn about having to stop and pick up some stuff. You stayed in the car and kept the motor running for him. He went into an office building. When he came out, he was out of breath. He got behind the wheel and you went to Maryland and got married and took a cottage on the shore. He acted funny. You weren't happy like you thought you would be. He got drunk too often.

"Then he showed you an item in the paper he sent you to town to pick up. A couple had cracked the office safe of a gem merchant and taken a special shipment of four carat blue-white diamonds that had just been brought in from Amsterdam by a courier. One million dollars worth. You finally caught on. What horrified you was that the building janitor had interrupted and when Boo slugged him, he cracked his skull. The man died. Boo was hot for two reasons. One, the law was after him because it was murder. Two, he had crossed up the little group who had cased the job by jumping the gun and handling it solo. He felt that, as newlyweds, the two of you had an almost perfect cover.

"You couldn't adjust yourself to the

idea that your brand-new husband was a big-time crook. You began to hate him. One day you went for a walk down the shore. You came back and found him dead with a bullet in his brain. The gun was on the floor. The place had been turned upside down. You got in the car and drove away. Thirty miles down the road you cracked it up.

"They brought you to trial and you were identified as the gal who waited in the car while Boo worked. They tried to hang his murder on you but they couldn't. But they did get you for the assist on the robbery. They got you for four years worth. We have our sources of information. The ice has never hit the market. The stones had a special cut, specifically ordered for one special customer. To cut them up would be almost impossible due to the size and cut. You were a scared kid.

"A warning was smuggled in to you during the trial. Take your sentence and keep your mouth shut about anything Boo might have said about who it was who planned the job with him. If you didn't, they'd get you out of prison and fix you. You told me about that. Remember? You kept your mouth shut because you were a frightened gal whose world had blown up in her face. When I got out I made a report to my . . . associates. Now we want you to do some talking. We want a line on who Boo was working with. We can protect you. And we can cut you in if as and when we get our hands on that stashed ice."

They all watched Eileen. Her knuckles were white against the cocktail glass. "I don't know anything." She said it with emphasis.

"You can trust us," Bren said.

She gave him a quick look. There was disgust in it. "I'm through with all that. It never happened. I don't want anything more to do with it."

Bren nodded at Cam. He walked over to her, stood with his hands on his hips and grinned at her. "Listen, jailwren. We don't want to horse around. We've made a little investment in you. We're willing to keep on, see? We'll get that face fixed and arrange so that you live right. But don't give us that 'through with all that' line. We don't care for it."

"I didn't ask to be given anything."

"But you were, honey," Betty cooed. "You were. Now play nice. I've got a friend looking for talent for one of his road shows. You wouldn't want to tour South America, would you?"

Eileen looked at her hands. "And what do I get," she asked tonelessly, "If I tell you what you want to know?"

Bren felt a sadness in him. It was probably expecting too much to ask for ethics on the part of a girl who had just spent four unjust years in prison. Yet the ethical problem was very delicately balanced. To give information now would mean joining forces with persons outside the law—yet it would be giving information against those who had killed Boo—and he had been her husband. The basic problem really was whether or not Eileen Kraft was warped by her imprisonment to such an extent that she was willing to work outside the law in order to 'get back' at society.

"You get," Betty said, "five thousand dollars once we get our hands on the stones. That is a nice fee for a gal to have to readjust with."

Eileen stood up slowly. With surprising quickness she hurled her glass at Betty's face. Betty ducked the glass and it shattered against the wall. The drink spotted her tan suit.

"I've always wanted to see South America," Eileen said. She went into the bedroom and slammed the door.

**B**ETTY dabbed at the spots on her suit with a napkin. "Fine, Bren," she said softly. "Just dandy! Now what?"

He frowned. "It was the best guess. I'm sure of that. Now we've got to try her reaction to the law."

"How?"

"Eddy Mace is posted in the lobby with a description. You two get out and I'll try one more time, then leave and give Eddy the word."

She came out of the bedroom a few minutes after Betty and Cam left. She wore the outmoded clothes she had worn when she walked out of prison. Her voice was calm. She set the suitcase down and said, "Thanks again, Mr. Mahar. I guess you fooled me. But I guess I was fooled once before."

"What are you going to do?"

"I can get a job in a laundry, I guess."

"Eileen, do me a favor. Just tell me why you won't come across with that information?"

Her smile was crooked. "Very simple. I'm still the dumb kid I was when I married Boo, thinking he was a salesman. In prison I thought I would get out and do wrong things. But I can't. Right is right and wrong is wrong, and I'm not joining up with people who should have been in jail instead of me. Stupid, isn't it?"

"A little." He smiled at her. "You know who Boo was working with. I'd think you'd want to get back at the people who killed him. Why don't you take your dope to the law if you're so virtuous?"

Her face hardened. "In gratitude? I've had too much of the law, Bren. No thanks. For me, the whole thing is over and done. I don't care who has what gems or who killed Boo. I'm leaving now."

He lifted the phone. "Miss Kraft is checking out. Add the charges to my bill, please. This is Mahar in ten-forty." He hung up. "Good luck, Eileen."

As soon as the door closed behind her, he phoned the desk again and had Mace paged. Eddy Mace was on the phone within seconds.

"On the way down, Eddy," Bren said. "Dark dress and a dark blue coat, carrying a brown imitation-leather suitcase. Luck."

He went into the bedroom. The new things were all there—every last item. He decided that he would have to bring his own suitcase down and pack the stuff into it. The phone rang.

"Bren? What the hell kind of gag is this?"

"What do you mean?"

"She went out the front and turned up the street. She got about forty feet when a guy walked up beside her and took her arm. He steered her to a car and away they went. Two cabs were loading in front and I didn't have a chance to grab one."

"License?"

"Somebody had rubbed a handful of mud across it. Looked like Jersey plates. Black sedan, forty-six or forty-seven.

I tried to run up to get a better look at the guys. One was behind the wheel. The other shoved her in the back and got in with her. They got going too fast. The one who took her arm was slim, about five ten, dark blue suit and a gray felt hat."

"Nothing more?"

"Not a damn thing, Bren. The guy behind the wheel didn't wear a hat. I couldn't see him good. Dark hair."

Brendan Mahar used several of the more specific Anglo-Saxon phrases. "Where's Cam and Betty?"

"They gave me the sign and went in the bar."

"Hold 'em there. I'll be right down—"

The other three looked tense. Bren said slowly, "We've got to do some clear thinking. The proper assumption, I believe, is that she was grabbed by the same outfit who killed Boo and gave her a warning. But the whole thing doesn't mesh right. Frankly, it stinks. If they knew that she was dangerous to them once she got out, wouldn't it have been easier to fence the stones a few months ago? After all, over four years have gone by. I've never heard of a large haul being held up so long. It has bothered me right along. And now it bothers me more."

Cam said, pinching his ear lobe, "I see where you're heading. And that doesn't make good sense either. One of the first ideas was that they didn't get the stones. That cabin was taken apart piece by piece. Every inch of ground was dug up. The times fitted so well that it was shown that she couldn't have hidden the stones anywhere along that thirty-mile run. Even so, every inch of the road on both sides was searched to make sure she didn't heave them out of the car."

"Still," Bren said, "I like it my way. The stones haven't hit the market because they were never recovered. The outfit who tried to move in blundered when they killed Boo too fast. They blundered again when they let the girl get away. So they figure one of two things—either she knows where to recover them, or else she can give them a clue to where Boo hid them so well. There is always the chance that he stashed them before they ever got to the cabin. So, with a million at stake,

they wait the four years and then grab her."

"Why not when she got out of the place?" Betty asked.

"They might have been around. I was there at three-thirty. I would have scared them off, but they could have followed us here. And the first time she was outside the hotel alone, they grabbed her. If they already had the stones, grabbing her would be like driving tacks with a sledge hammer. Too risky for what little they'd gain. If they've been covering the hotel, you can be damn well certain that they know who we are and who we represent."

"It makes a problem," Cam said. "Do we report it officially?"

Betty shivered. "She's with some pretty rough people, my friend. I don't like to think about how they may want to encourage her to be frank. We were phonies. Now she's up against the real thing."

"No. We don't report it. Not quite yet. I'm still trying to think as they would. If it were me, I'd take her right to Maryland just as fast as I could. Then, when you get something out of her, you're close to the right spot and can check quicker to see if she has lied. Eddy, you report to the office and tell them that, on a hunch, Cam and I are heading on down there. We don't need you any further, Betty."

She stood up. Her smile was a grimace. "Well, I tried. I guess my Carl will keep right on punching a clock."

"If we make a recovery, Betty, we won't forget you completely."

THE town on the Eastern Shore had somewhat the look of a circus ground the day after the circus had left—as though it were licking the wounds the summer had brought. The sky had the look of ocean-side, and signs flapped forlornly in the stiff wind. The sunlight had a watery appearance and the smell of the sea was strong.

The town was a shopping center for the big beachside estates as well as the rental cabins along the less desirable stretch of beach, the trailer parks, the camping grounds.

Bren pulled up to the pumps, got out and stretched his cramped muscles. Cam got out the other side. Three of the four

corners held gas stations. As the attendant filled the tank, Bren said casually, "Had a little car trouble and got separated from the rest of our party. Wonder if they stopped here. Forty-seven sedan with Jersey plates, two men and a blonde girl. The girl had a scar on her face."

"Don't remember 'em, mister."

Cam had already headed across to one of the other stations. Bren could see him standing in the morning sun talking to the attendant. Bren sauntered over to the third station.

The elderly man listened and said, "Yep. Came through here maybe an hour ago. Got gas and cigarettes. Remember 'em because the girl used the women's room and the fella with her stood right outside the door until she came out. Like he didn't want her too far away from him. Say, that's some scar on the lady. Automobile accident?"

"Did you get any idea of where they were heading?"

"Wouldn't you know that if you were traveling together?" The old man's eyes were hard with sudden suspicion.

Bren lowered his voice. "You look like a man I can trust. That girl was taken along against her will. My friend and I want to get her out of a jam. What did the two men look like?"

The old man pursed his lips. "Didn't care much for their looks. We get a few of that kind down here during the season. Edgy. Suspicious. One fella 'bout forty, I'd say. Grease on his hair. The other one thinner and about ten years younger. Dressed expensive. No tan. They gave me a quarter. I own this station and I don't like to get tipped, but I took it."

Cam had come up and he stood quietly beside Bren. "Where were they going? Do you know?"

"Here's all I know. When they were all in the car and I was wiping the windshield, the young one asked me if the stores were open yet. I told him it would be another half hour. He called me Pop. I don't like that either. Then the older one said there was enough stuff at the place and he could run in and get more later. So I'd say they were around here someplace."

"I suppose there's lots of places to rent

this time of year. Who would know about that sort of thing?"

"Try Pink Lee over the bank, mister. He's an agent for a lot of the places and he generally knows what's going on with the places he doesn't handle."

"Thanks a lot. You've been a lot of help."

"Are you cops?"

"Not exactly. We're sort of on their team though."

"This is going to bother me wondering how it came out. If it wouldn't be too much trouble to stop when—"

"Okay. . . ."

They parked in front of the bank. Cam said, "You sure are lucky, Bren."

"All we had to do was to ask at twenty-three gas stations, if that's what you mean. Let me handle Pink Lee."

The man was in his office. The nickname was obvious. He had a vast porcine face, a fuzz of reddish hair and shrewd little blue eyes.

"Friends," he boomed, "you've come to the right man. Yes sir, to the right man. Whether you want a twenty-room seaside palace, or a compact and comfortable little one-room nest, I've got it. And let me tell you that just this morning I decided it was time to cut the rentals down to our winter level. There is no more beautiful stretch of beach under the sun than right here, friends. And I'm free this morning to take you around and show you anything you might . . ."

Bren held up his hand. "Don't waste it on us, Mr. Lee."

The sales smile slipped. "Hmmm! Salesmen? Income tax? Lawyers?"

"We've heard, Mr. Lee, that you might know if a place was rented quite recently to two men driving a forty-seven sedan with Jersey plates. They would be pretty hard-looking people and more concerned about seclusion than about conveniences."

The blue eyes were suddenly vague. "I might know and I might not. Hard telling."

"They would probably have paid cash in advance."

"It taxes my old brain to have to remember."

The blue eyes became alert as Bren pulled out his billfold. The smile spread as he saw the denomination of the bill.



Fat pink fingers reached out with amazing delicacy and precision. The bill flickered once and disappeared.

"Take the shore road down to the three forks four miles below town. Keep to the left. Take the second dirt road on the left and follow it about a half mile. You'll come to a bunch of mailboxes. Look sharp and fifty feet or so beyond the mail boxes you'll see a track going off into the brush. It goes a hundred yards down to the beach. Three-room camp with vertical pine siding. It was rented ten days ago and a full month paid in advance in cash. And I know the bulge a belly gun makes, friends. But, as I said, this is the slack season, so I tacked an extra fifty onto the price."

"What was the name?"

The grin grew even wider. "Smith, naturally."

Outside, in the car again, Cam asked, "Do we wait for the friendly gloom of night?"

"That gives them a chance to work on her all day. Put them an hour and a half ahead of us. Allow another half hour for us to work our way close. Two hours. After four years they aren't likely to take time out for tea. We go right now, and hope they'll be too eager to use the normal precautions."

The car was gathering speed. Cam whistled softly between his teeth. He spun the cylinder of the .38, smiled happily and shoved it back into the shoulder holster.

The dirt road was lumpy. After they had gone a half mile, Cam said, "Mailboxes coming up." Bren drove by without slackening speed. A hundred yards further the road dipped into a hollow. The ditch on the left was shallow. He pulled off, rocked through the ditch and forced the nose of the car through the brush. It scraped on the bottom and snapped up behind them.

When they walked back and found the track near the mailboxes, Bren lowered his voice and said, "This thing, according to Pink, is a hundred yards along. So we'll go down it fifty yards and then I'll cut off to the left. You cut off to the right. The sound of the surf on the beach will cover the sound of our thrashing around. Make it about a forty-five degree angle. We'll come out on the beach.

"Stay back in the edge of the brush and work your way toward the cabin. Get just as close as you can and play dead. I'll work my way close and go in fast. You'll hear me go in because I'll be yelling. When you hear that, put two shots into the place, up under the eaves in case they carry through. If anything goes wrong, they'll be coming out fast. Aim for the knees."

"Why don't we both go in at once?"

"We need a second line of defense, Cam. If nobody comes out and if everything is under control, I'll call you. Come in then."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Open House for Homicide

BREN counted off sixteen paces and then nodded to Cam. They both turned off the trail. Bren worked his way through the dense brush. Brambles caught at his clothes. The steady roar of the sea grew louder. The brush began to thin and finally he saw the sunlit glint of water, the white combers coming slowly in. Gulls wheeled along the line of surf. A small ship was low against the horizon. There was coarse sand underfoot.

He turned right and began to move down the brush line, his gun in his hand, his palm sweating against the grip, the trigger metal cold against his crooked finger.

After a dozen cautious steps he saw the shape of the cabin through the leaves. There were two windows on the side facing him. He crouched and went ahead a half-dozen running steps and sprawled full length. There were probably two doors. One in the back and one facing the water. The dusty sedan stood with hood pointing up the trail. The sedan would give him good cover, he decided.

Poor gal, he thought, *Any playmates of Boo are going to have some very efficient ideas.* He turned right again, moving cautiously, never taking his eyes from the windows until he had the car between him and the cabin. He moved quickly to the car, crouched behind it and looked over the hood, raising his eyes slowly. The flimsy door was ajar.

*Good! I can make a hell of a racket!*

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## John D. MacDonald

kicking it open. What was that? Like a moan. Damn them, she's had a bad enough time.

He moved around the hood, crouched by the front wheel. Five running steps to the door. He previewed them in his mind. Kick hard with the sixth step and go right in. He gathered himself, tensing his muscles. *Run on the count of three. Get in fast and whirl against the wall. There are two of them. Keep your back covered.*

One! Two! The door was pulled open from the inside and a man in shirt sleeves appeared in the doorway. Bren was frozen with shock and surprise. The man's eyes widened and he yanked the gun out of the waist-band of his pants. Bren tried to scramble back and his foot slipped and he sprawled awkwardly. It seemed to take a thousand minutes to swivel his own weapon around to bear.

Two shots sounded almost at once. Sand kicked into Bren's face, stinging him with the force of it. The man in the doorway staggered. Bren saw it in a painful mist. The grains of sand had been driven into his eyes. A dozen yards away Cam came to his feet with a yell, bounding toward the cabin on a dead run. He fired as he ran. His legs could not keep up with the angle of his torso. His face drove down into the sand and he lay still.

The door slammed. Tears rolled down Bren's face from his inflamed eyes. He rolled back behind the car, cursing bitterly. The world was a crazy wavering place, as though he viewed it from under water.

He rolled at the sound behind him. His wrist was stamped into the ground and he tried to twist away from the kick. It caught him under the ear. The other one had come around the car from the opposite direction.

He did not completely lose consciousness. He was yanked to his feet, bent back against the hood of the car and slugged in the mouth. He tasted blood. He could not make out the face so close to his own. He was shoved toward the door. He stumbled against something soft and fell. Once again he was yanked to his feet, pushed inside the cabin. The tears

(Please continue on page 92)

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## John D. MacDonald

(Continued from page 90)

had carried away some of the sand. Eileen was a pale blur in the far corner.

"Sand," he said, "in my eyes. Can't see a thing."

"Too damned bad." Hard hands slapped at his clothes. The room began to clear a little. The left eye was the worst.

The same man who had appeared in the doorway and taken Cam's bullet was stretched out on a drab couch.

"I'm . . . all ripped up inside," he said weakly. "Get a doc, quick, Barney."

"Where is it?"

"Right . . . here. It come out at my side."

The one called Barney, the older one, went over to the couch. He held the gun on Bren, reached down and fumbled with Freddy's shirt. The man on the couch groaned. He helped expose the area. Barney glanced down, then quickly averted his face.

"Everything's getting sort of . . . soft and warm and far away . . . how about a doc?"

"Sure, kid. Take a nap. I'll go get one."

"Barney . . . I . . ." The voice was faint. He gave a long, shuddering sigh and Bren, watching, could not see the chest lift for another breath.

He looked over at Eileen and saw that her wrists were tied to the chair arms.

Barney said, as though to himself, "It was going to be split four ways. Boo, Freddy, Laura and me. Boo crosses us and Freddy killed him. Laura and Freddy and me. So she has to get herself killed by a drunken kid in a souped-up heap. Now just me. A one-way split." His voice hardened.

"Who the hell are you? You picked her up at the gates. There's you and the dead one outside and a chunky black-haired woman. Talk, friend, because one more dead one isn't going to make a damn bit of difference."

Bren glanced at Eileen. A great purple bruise was slowly spreading across her left cheekbone. The eye was nearly closed.

He said, "You can check this by taking my billfold and looking at the identification. The man outside and I are operatives with the Harrison Agency."

## A Corpse on Me!

"We traced you here after sending word for more men to close in on you."

Barney pursed his lips. "I don't think so, pal. You would have waited. There'd be a nice bonus for you, wouldn't there? And you look like the kind of jerk who'd think two guys would be enough to take us. I think I'll just chill you and rope you up while I work on the little lady."

**H**HE MOVED slowly toward Brendan. Behind the man, at the window, Bren saw Cam's big-knuckled hand grasp the windowsill. He looked away, not too quickly. He said easily, "She could have told us a little before you grabbed her, Barney."

"What sort of a play is this, pal?"

Out of the corner of his eye Bren saw the corn-colored hair slowly lift above the still.

Bren slowly pulled his heels back closer to the chair and moved a fraction of an inch forward to get more of his weight centered over his feet. A fist lifted with slow effort, the knuckles clenched. Then it drove toward the pane of glass. Bren was watching Barney's face. The moment it began to whirl to face the window, he drove up and forward, chopping down hard at the gun wrist.

The gun thumped on the floor and skidded away. Barney grunted, broke Bren's hold and stabbed for his eyes with spread fingers. Bren ducked and felt the fingernails break skin on his forehead. His eyesight was still not right. He twisted in time to take a crippling kick on his hip, missed his grab for the ankle. As he missed, Barney swung an uppercut that caught Bren squarely in the throat. The pain of it took away his strength. His arms were suddenly too heavy to lift.

Barney felled him with an overhand chop to the jaw and he sprawled, looking up to see Barney dive for the gun. It was near Eileen's feet. Her face was contorted. She kicked hard and her high-heeled shoe caught Barney flush in the face. She kicked at the gun and it spun over toward Bren. He scrambled to it, heard Barney's floor-shaking stride, rolled and fired almost without aim. Barney fell with a thin, clear, high scream.

Bren walked unsteadily to the door.



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## John D. MacDonald

He found Cam on his back under the window. Cam's eyes were open.

"Should have let me rush 'em," Cam gasped.

"You killed the one you shot at. I got the other one in the leg."

"Better leave me here and come back with an ambulance. My legs are going numb."

He went in and cut Eileen loose. Barney had fainted.

She sat silently beside him as he sped back to town, hanging tightly to the door handle.

The ambulance siren dwindled in the distance. He drove slowly to the police station. Chief Palmer was a weedy, gray man with dirt-rimmed fingernails. He sighed frequently as Brendan told his story. He gave the two of them a look of stoney disgust.

"All right. All right. The people here never give any trouble. People like you are always importing it. Don't leave town, you two."

They walked out into the sunshine. Eileen said, "Why didn't you tell me who you were?"

"Would it have made any difference?"

"I . . . I guess not."

"Want to come with me while I take the taxi out and collect my own car?"

"There's nothing else to do."

The cab drove slowly. "We're probably all wrong. Someone will stumble on the hiding place. But it will be by accident. Boo never told you where he hid them."

"No, he didn't."

"If he was going to hide them around the cabin, he'd get you out of the way. He used to send you driving into town for groceries, didn't he?" She nodded. "And that would give him plenty of time to pick a spot so good that they never found it."

"I guess so," she said.

"Think hard. Was there anything peculiar that he did or said that would be a clue? I mean was there any place around the cabin he didn't want you to go?"

"No."

They were silent the rest of the way. He paid the cab driver and they transferred to his car.



## A Corpse on Me!

She said, after he had backed out and turned around, "You've started me thinking, Bren. He *did* act funny about one thing. He had plenty of money on him and he was . . . lazy. And yet he spent a lot of time trying to work on the car. It used to make him furious. I told him I could take it to a garage and he . . . hit me. That was the first time he hit me."

He tightened his hands on the wheel. "You cracked the car up in the next town up the line, didn't you?"

"I hit a tree. I was crying."

"Total wreck?"

"No. I wasn't going fast."

"The chief said not to leave town. He won't miss us for an hour or so. What kind of car was it?"

"A 1942 blue coupe—with those little seats in back."

**T**WO garages in the next town had wreckers. The first garage they asked at was the one. The owner was a big, hard-faced man in his fifties who directed them to the buyer of the car.

Tryner was raking the leaves in front of his house. Bren had left Eileen down the street. The blue coupe was parked in front. Bren walked by, then stopped, turned around and went back to the car and looked in.

"Want something?" Tryner called.

Bren grinned. "Would you want to sell that car?"

"Why!"

"Cracked one up just like it a month ago. I'd pay a good price for it."

Tryner leaned on his rake. "How much?"

"Oh, maybe nine hundred—that is if it hasn't been in any wrecks."

"No wrecks. Perfect condition. Make it nine-fifty, mister, and you can drive it right down and get the new plates put on it today."

"Nine twenty-five."

"A deal." Tryner grinned. . . .

Eileen shivered when she saw the car. He fixed up the new plates, showed her how to work the automatic shift of his car and followed her slowly back to the town they were not supposed to leave.

The elderly man in the gas station, in return for a full report, loaned him tools

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## John D. MacDonald

and working space. Eileen sat on a box and watched him. The coveralls were too small. He worked methodically, carefully, but without bothering to reassemble the parts he dismantled. He eliminated one possibility after another. If the stones had been taped up under the fender wells, they would long since have dropped off. He pulled the gas tank, drained it, shook it.

After he had gone over the floor boards, the back of the dash, the possibility of a double back on the glove compartment, he straightened up and frowned. He took a screw driver and went to work on the inside door panels. Front left was clean. Front right. He looked curiously at the black mass in the forward corner below the window mechanism. Tar. He pried it off. It was hard. He broke it in half. It was roughly the size of two slices of bread, side by side. The clear blue-white of an exposed facet winked back the afternoon sunlight in dazzling prismatic colors. . . .

Four months later, in the darkness of a February afternoon, Bren pulled up beside the slim girl who had just walked out of the employee's door of the department store. He touched the horn ring lightly, rolled the window down and said, "I just happen to be going your way."

Eileen hesitated and then got in quickly.

Bren said: "I was going to leave you alone. But I just can't get you out of my head."

"What do you want me to do?" she said in a half-whisper.

"Let me hang around. It will either take or I'll get over it."

"No, Bren. I'm not ready yet. I have not forgotten enough yet. Let me have two months alone."

He took her shoulders and pulled her roughly to him. He meant the kiss to be violent, but it was surprisingly tender. She backed away and opened the door. Her eyes were wide. "I can . . . get home from here. It's not far."

"Two months then. You won't run away?"

She stepped out onto the curb. "No, I won't run away. And . . . maybe one month will be long enough." The door chunked shut and she disappeared.

THE END

## Lethal Legacy for the Lady

(Continued from page 70)

"Listen, boss . . ." Sweet-Boy's voice trailed off as Populo's eyes glinted.

"Blair tells me you knocked off the red-head. Is that right?"

Sweet-Boy didn't answer.

"And it looks as if you drove Ace Forrest right into Kingdom Come."

Sweet-Boy shifted uneasily.

Cindy spoke up. "Vince, I think you'd better call the police. We don't want to get any more involved."

Vince smiled patiently. "Miss Forrest, do you want to see your boy friend tried for murder? In a Panama court?"

"Of course not."

"Then be a good girl and step outside until we convince Sweet-Boy that it would be better to hang in Panama than to die by degrees in California."

We sat on the porch and had a cigarette. I told Cindy how I'd found her and how I'd worried. She pressed my hand. In a few minutes Populo was out.

"OK," he said. "They're all aching to sing now." He turned to me. "Nice work, Blair. I've sent them down to the station with three of the boys . . . and their story will clear you." There was a long silence.

"All right, Vince. Let's go inside and cut for the house," Cindy said.

Vince looked out at the setting sun. "Well, Miss Forrest, it's like this. I don't think I want to. All this has changed my mind, you might say."

Cindy laughed. "Save it, Vince. On you a halo looks awful. Ace wanted it."

We walked into the gambling room. My throat was tight and my heart was pounding. I offered up a silent prayer to the laws of chance.

The word had passed around. Waiters, dealers, croupiers drifted over from their tables to watch. Populo picked up a deck of cards and shuffled them absently.

"One cut?" Cindy nodded. "You first."

Cindy reached out, her hand steady, and took a card. I held my breath.

"Three of clubs," she said quietly. My heart dropped. I cursed under my breath.

Populo started to reach for a card. Slim Capor stood behind him, smiling vaguely. Populo's hand stopped in midair.

"Mind if Slim draws for me?"

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## Hank Searls

A chill raced through me. "Hey, wait a minute," I started. "That guy's the slick-est—" Behind me I felt a movement from one of Populo's boys, and a gun dug into my ribs. I shut up, seething.

Cindy eyed Populo coolly.

"All right," she said. "Let Slim draw."

Slim shrugged. His long, sensitive fingers reached for a card. He picked it up, looked at it, and showed it around.

It was the two of hearts.

I glanced at Populo. He met my eye. Behind the thick glasses a lid dropped slowly in a wink.

"Well," he said. "That's that." He turned to the crowd. "Break out the champagne. Everybody drinks tonight, to the new boss."

We sat on the porch with an ice-bucket of champagne by our table, the blonde and I, and watched the golden sun kiss the storm clouds good night. Her hand was warm in mine.

"Mike," she said finally. "That was a cold deck. Wasn't it?"

"That's right, Cindy," I said. "Never play against the house."

THE END

(Continued from page 6)

and is not forthcoming, make sure there is no obstruction in the "coin return" slot.

B. Wilson  
Temple City, Calif.

### Bouncing Bills

Dear Sir:

A year ago poultry was the main source of cash on my farm. One day a poultry buyer came to our door. He was honest in appearance and very genial. He explained that he could pay two cents per pound more for hens than the local buyers, because he had his own truck and carried them direct to the big city markets.

When he left our community he carried with him about three hundred dollars worth of my neighbors's hens, and they had a collection of nice crisp checks. They looked like paper, but must have been rubber for they bounced back from the bank marked: *Party unknown*. Needless to say we never saw the genial poultry dealer again.

A. H. Summers  
Murray, Ky.

That's the lowdown on the slick schemes for this month, detective fans. Don't forget to write us about your own experiences with crooked rackets so that we'll all keep posted.

The Editor

**Build a Fine Business—FULL or SPARE TIME!**

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